

BIBLE STORY WEEK 3

As we've been making our way through the Bible together this year, you may have noticed something that tended to come up a lot: the religious leaders did NOT like Jesus or His message. They spent months plotting to silence Jesus, but none of their plans had been successful. In fact, Jesus had become more popular than ever! On the Sunday before Passover, Jesus entered Jerusalem to great CHEERS from the crowds. But things were about to change for the religious leaders and their plotting, because one of Jesus' disciples, Judas, went to them with a plan.

Judas said he would hand Jesus over to them in exchange for 30 pieces of silver.

Jesus is God's Son, so He knows everything. That means He knew what Judas had planned. But He also knew that His mission was to face those who hated Him and to allow them to take Him without defending Himself.

The time had come to celebrate Passover, and Jesus had gathered with His closest friends to share the special meal.

Jesus shared the meal with them, and then He led them out of the city. By this point, Judas had already left them to go finish his plan of turning Jesus over to the religious leaders.

Jesus knew what was coming, and He wanted to prepare His friends for what would happen next. He told them:

Open the Bible to John 16:16 and 16:28 (NIrV) and read.

"In a little while, you will no longer see me. Then after a little while, you will see me... I came from the Father and entered the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

Then Jesus led the disciples toward the garden of Gethsemane. He told them how the next few days were going to go. He told the disciples that they were actually going to turn away from Him. In fact, they would even deny knowing Him. Peter couldn't believe this idea. He told Jesus he would never turn away from Him. But Jesus told Peter that before the rooster crowed again—in other words, before the next morning—Peter would deny knowing Jesus three times.

Peter insisted he would never do that, and the other disciples said the same thing.

Eventually they reached the garden. Jesus told the disciples to sit there while He went to pray, but He took Peter, James, and John with Him a little farther. Jesus knew what He was about to do, and it felt very heavy for Him.

Listen to what He told the three men:

Open the Bible to Matthew 26:38 (NIrV) and read.

“My soul is very sad. I feel close to death. Stay here. Keep watch with me.”

Then Jesus walked a little farther and stopped to pray.

He said: Open the Bible to Matthew 26:39 (NIrV) and read.

“My Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. But let what you want be done, not what I want.”

After Jesus finished praying, He returned to His friends, but instead of praying, He found them . . . sleeping. Jesus had some words for His disciples for sure.

Open the Bible to Matthew 26:40-41 (NIrV) and read.

“Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray. Then you won’t fall into sin when you are tempted. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

Then Jesus left the men and went back to pray a second time. He prayed:

Open the Bible to Matthew 26:42 (NIrV) and read.

“My Father, is it possible for this cup to be taken away? But if I must drink it, may what you want be done.” “

After He finished praying the second time, Jesus returned to His disciples, and once again, He found them sleeping. So He left them and went away again.

For the third time, Jesus prayed the same thing—begging for God to take away what was coming and yet sharing His trust in God’s plan. Then Jesus went back to His disciples, who were—yep, you guessed it—sleeping. Surely they were caught up on sleep by now?!

Jesus said:

Open the Bible to Matthew 26:45-46 (NIrV) and read.

“Are you still sleeping and resting? Look! The hour has come. The Son of Man is about to be handed over to sinners. Get up! Let us go! Here comes the one who is handing me over to them!”

Yes, Judas had arrived. There was a large crowd of people with him, carrying swords and clubs. This mob had been sent by the religious leaders.

Part of Judas’ plan was to greet Jesus with a kiss so the mob would know who to arrest. Judas kissed Jesus on the cheek and greeted Him.

Jesus responded: “Friend, do what you came to do” (Matthew 26:50, NIrV).

The men who arrived with Judas grabbed Jesus to arrest Him. As they did, Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. The crowd gasped.

But Jesus stopped Peter.

Open the Bible to Matthew 26:52-54 (NIrV) and read.

“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him. “All who use the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I can’t ask my Father for help? He would send an army of more than 70,000 angels right away. But then how would the Scriptures come true? They say it must happen in this way.”

Jesus touched the servant’s ear, and the man was healed. The crowd probably gasped again!.

Then Jesus spoke to the crowd:

Open the Bible to Matthew 26:55-56 (NIrV) and read.

“Am I leading a band of armed men against you?” he asked. “Do you have to come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courtyard teaching. And you didn’t arrest me. But all this has happened so that the words of the prophets would come true.”

And just like that, things happened as Judas had planned, and just like Jesus knew they would. The mob arrested Jesus and led Him away.

Jesus’ friends, who had promised to stay with Him through anything, ran away.

Jesus had chosen the path that would bring life for everyone—but it would cost Him everything.

Judas might have thought this had gone according to HIS plan . . . but it was actually part of God’s plan all along. It had always been God’s plan to send Jesus to be our Savior. Now the time had come for Jesus to put God’s plan into motion, and Jesus followed through. He showed the perfect example of humility. He put US first when He died on the cross for our sins.

We can follow Jesus’ example, too.

“We can choose to put others first.”

But you and I know that’s not always easy. Even Jesus had to beg God to help Him. So surely you and I need to ask God for help if we want to put others first. We need God’s help in order to treat others the way we want to be treated. Let’s talk to God about that now.

PRAYER

Dear God,

it’s amazing to see how Jesus chose to put us first. Jesus was PERFECT. He had never done anything wrong. But He was willing to give up His life on the cross. He put us first when He died for us, and it was all part of Your good plan. We want to show humility and follow the example Jesus gave us, but we need Your help. Please give each of us the strength we need to put others first. We love You, and we ask these things in Jesus’ name,
Amen.

Putting others first isn’t easy. Think about it: even Jesus had to ask God for help.

When He was in the garden praying, Jesus talked to His Father; He asked if there were any other way to do what He had come to do. But in the end, Jesus finished the prayer by giving up what He wanted for the sake of God’s bigger plan. “God’s plan had been in place since the very beginning.

Ever since Adam and Eve messed up in the Garden of Eden, God had a plan to bring His people back to Him. When the time was right, He sent Jesus to be our Savior.

“Jesus put others first. And we can, too.”

What does it look like to put others first? Well, it could look a little different every day and in every situation. It could be something as simple as playing a video game that you don't especially like but that your friend really loves. Or maybe it's happily going to a restaurant that isn't your favorite, because it's your sister's favorite. Or maybe even it's playing a game the way your friend plays, even though it's not how you like to play it.

It comes down to something that we say around here all the time:

Treat others the way you want to be treated

When you put others first, you show them just how much you value them.