

Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

rfour.org

Year 1: Session 6 – Lent (according to the Gospel of John)

Class 18: John 19:12-34 – *Jesus is crucified*

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Introduce idea of “fight or flight” and then look at how Jesus chooses a third way – God’s way
- Read and discuss the story
- Use the activity to help students connect other Bible stories where the fight or flight choice is ignored and God’s way is chosen instead.

Materials needed

- Video clip from “How To Train Your Dragon” (can be seen on rfour.org)
- Electronics that show the video clip
- A way to display the Bible “trivia quiz game” – Laptop hooked up to a TV for instance
- Questions to display are located at end of the lesson

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- Here’s the opening question for today’s class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here is this week’s question:* What’s something that you’d rather run away from than fight?

INTRO / Transition to VIDEO

- When we’re afraid, our bodies biologically respond with increased heart beats, sweating, faster breathing and elevated adrenaline levels.
- This is our body’s way of being ready to either fight or flee.
- Because of this, it is often called the “flight or fight” response.
- This is a biological response that helped us stay alive, especially back in caveman days, when we were hunters, and occasionally, the hunted.

- We still have this response today and it often makes us think that these are our only two choices – to fight or run away – when presented with any stressful situation.
- To help us think about the “fight or flight” response, let’s watch the following movie clip from “How to train your dragon.”

VIEW MOVIE CLIP

ASK

- So what was Hiccup (the boy) going to do to the dragon? (kill it)
- After he realizes he can't kill the dragon, what does it seem like Hiccup briefly considers doing before he tells himself, "I did this"? (seems like he's thinking of just leaving the dragon there all tied up and just walking away from the whole situation)
- So Hiccup could've run away or he could've killed the dragon, but what does Hiccup do instead? (he unties the dragon)
- What is the dragon's response to being untied (first it seems to want to fight, then it actually flies away – a true fight or flight response)
- So Hiccup doesn't fight or flee -- do you think the choice that Hiccup made was an easy one for him to make—and why? (Not really easy -- the choice went against all that he had been taught and put himself in great danger, to the point that he faints at the end of the scene)
- Do you think Hiccup made the best choice here? (Probably the best choice since the dragon and Hiccup become friends and then help each other out in ways that dragons and humans had never done before – according to the story)

Transition to scripture

- So keep Hiccup's decision in mind as we read today's scripture story, which is the main part of John's account of Jesus' crucifixion.
- John tells the story a little bit differently than the other three gospels do.
- One of the main differences is that there is no crowd that Pilate interacts with. There are ONLY the Pharisees and Chief Priests. So whenever it says, “the Jews” or “they” – that reference is toward the Jewish leadership only, not the people in general.
- Another big difference is that the timing of Jesus' crucifixion is different. In John, Jesus is crucified ON Passover, not the day after Passover. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus has the last supper, which is also the Passover meal, with his disciples and is then arrested. In John, Jesus washes their feet on the night *before* Passover and is then crucified *on* Passover.
- We'll start the story near the end of Pilate's trial of Jesus. We're going to skip some of the back and forth between Pilate and the Pharisees, so here's some background of what we've missed: The Jewish leadership has brought Jesus to Pilate to have him crucified. However, they have very vague and unsubstantiated accusations against Jesus. Pilate sees through the Pharisees and Chief Priests false claims, but doesn't know how to get himself out of the political predicament that the Jewish leadership is maneuvering him into. Pilate eventually gives in to what the Jewish leadership wants, but as you'll see, they don't like each other too much.

READ John 19:12-34 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse, including teachers*)

12 From then on Pilate tried to release him [Jesus], but the Jews [Pharisees and Chief Priests] cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor." 13 When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" 15 They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." 16 Then he handed him over to them [Roman soldiers – the Jewish leadership didn't have authority to crucify] to be crucified. So they took Jesus; 17 and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. 19 Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. 21 Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." 23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. 24 So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." 25 And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. 28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." 29 A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. 31 Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. 32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

ASK and then TELL (indented)

- Verse 14 – when did this story take place during the day? (around noon ON Passover – John's timeline is different than the other Gospels)
 - This is significant timing because on Passover, noon is the time when the lambs were usually slaughtered to begin the remembrance of Passover. The author of John is drawing parallels between the death of a lamb in the Passover story and the killing of Jesus
- Verse 15 – What do the chief priests say when Pilate asks if he should kill their king? (we have no king but the emperor)
 - This is a significantly bad thing for the chief priests to say – since their very job and role in Jewish society was to serve God first and foremost. To say that the Roman emperor was their sovereign is about as bad of a thing as someone in their position could say. The author of John really wants us to see the true nature of the people who orchestrate Jesus' death – just like Jacob, they will say and do whatever it takes to get what they want.
- Verse 17 – What is Jesus carrying? (his cross)

- In the other Gospels, Jesus is too weakened to do this and Simone of Cyrene is forced to help.
- Also, note that “the cross” would’ve been just the cross bar. Very few humans, if any, could carry a full cross. It’d be way too heavy. The vertical pole would already be at the crucifixion site
- Verse 18 – What happens to Jesus? (he is crucified)
 - That’s all we get as far as details go, most likely because everyone knew what crucifixion entailed because the Romans did it *a lot*. So, here’s how crucifixion kills you.
 - Crucifixion kills a person by using gravity. By pinning (a.k.a. nailing) the arms and legs to spots on the cross, gravity then acts on the rest of the body, pulling the person’s weight downward and forward (away from the cross). In so doing, the chest and lungs are compressed and unable to expand enough to allow for breathing. In order to breathe, then, the person would have to lift or pull themselves up against the nails that are pinning their arms and legs to the cross. This was incredibly painful, since the thick, heavy nails would be rubbing against bone. Eventually, the person becomes so tired and worn out from the pain that they stop pulling themselves up. Crucifixion was/is a very slow and painful form of suffocation.
 - Also, there’s no way that the bones in the hands can withstand this sort of pressure. The nails, then, would not have been driven through Jesus’ hands, but through his wrists, and not through his feet, but through his ankles.
 - Because it was a slow death, the soldiers would sometimes speed up the process by breaking the legs of the person being crucified. Doing so would make it even more difficult and painful to pull one’s self up for a breath since the arms would then have to do all the lifting.
- Verse 19 – the Romans would often put the charge/reason on a sign near or above the person being crucified that said why the person was being crucified. For what reason, then, was Jesus crucified? (for being the king of the Jews)
- Verse 23 – what’s remarkable about the tunic? (it is seamless)
 - In other words, this is a very expensive/rare type of garment. Who knew Jesus was so stylin’? Most likely, though, it was a gift.
- Verse 26 and 27 – Jesus is slowly dying, but what is he paying attention to in this moment? (that his mother be provided for and taken care of)
 - This is especially striking because we know that Jesus has brothers (who are the ones that *should* be taking care of Jesus’ mother). But Jesus instead entrusts his mother to his disciple.
- Verse 31 – What day is of great solemnity? (the day that they are living; the Sabbath *and* Passover)
 - This statement is meant to show the complete disconnect and lack of integrity the Pharisees and Chief Priests have: It’s ok for them to plan the murder of Jesus and enact said plan on this supposedly solemn day, but oh the horror(!) that the *results* of said plan would be on display – yes, indeed, because THAT’S the problem! (sorry for the sarcasm, there)
- Verse 34 – How is Jesus’ death verified (by gouging his side with a spear)
- Verse 34 cont – And what comes out? (blood and water)
 - There are physical reasons for why water may have come out (mostly likely clear, bodily fluids that looked like water), but that’s probably not why the author of John is mentioning this detail. Instead, think of the “I am” statements of Jesus. One of which is that he is the Living Water. Pair that statement with the ancient world’s association of life with blood and voila! You have an incredibly vivid visual of Life and Living Water pouring forth from Jesus. Just like he lived, so too did he die: Overflowing with God’s life-giving elements.

(more) TELL

- Before we go any farther – I just want to acknowledge how sad of a story this is. It really gets under my skin and bothers me – no matter how many times I read it. It’s ok if it doesn’t bother you, I’m not saying that you SHOULD be bothered by it. But if you ARE bothered by it, I’m letting you know that you’re not the only one.
 - *Optional* (because you may not agree or you may not want to rock the boat too much in class – trust me, I get it): And here’s why it bothers me so much: Jesus didn’t do *anything* to deserve this type of treatment. In the news these days, when someone gets killed or punished by the system, the media and internet commentators spend a lot of time and effort justifying why the system was right to kill or punish the person. When you see this justifying happen, know that it’s been happening for thousands of years. It’s an old story – which is why you see the Pharisees doing the same thing in this story – trying to justify to Pilate why the system should destroy Jesus. Are there people who make dangerous and violent decisions who then put themselves at risk? Yes, of course. But this whole approach of justifying punishment by assassinating a person’s character so that it’s ok, then, to also assassinate that person’s body should never sit well with those who call themselves Christians and live in a so-called Christian nation – because what they are condoning is the *Pharisee way*, the fight way, the failed way, the wrong-side-of-the-cross way: **The way that killed Jesus.**
- In our previous class, we saw that Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him. So why do you think Jesus didn’t run away or fight against the people who were going to arrest him?
- So what we see from Jesus is that he does not act in a fear – he does not fight or flight.
- Instead, he chooses to act on what God tells him to do. Jesus’ choice, then, leads to resurrection.
- This is similar to how Hiccup’s decision to not fight or flee eventually leads to being able to fly on a dragon.
- So, this choice that Jesus makes, to not fight or flee may at first seem like a unique decision.
- One that we maybe haven’t seen before or at least not in Bible story.
- But nope – that’s not quite true.
- In fact, throughout the Bible stories, both before and after Jesus, we see this same decision being made – where a character(s) chooses to not fight OR flee but instead choose God’s way.
- So, as a class, we’re going to take a quiz to see if we can name some of the characters who choose God’s way instead of the fight or flight way.

DO ACTIVITY (see end of lesson for questions)

ASK / TELL

- Hey – y’all did pretty good!
- Were you surprised at how many stories there are where this kind of choice is being made?
- Regardless if you were surprised or knew it all already -- as you can see from our activity, Jesus’ choice to act God’s way instead of the fight or flight way is not unique.
- And, what we can also see is that even though this choice is not easy to make, and often comes at a cost, the end result is that a greater understanding of God’s grace, mercy, and power is revealed in ways that running away or fighting would have never revealed.

CLOSING PRAYER

QUIZ QUESTIONS

What character, after trying to run away from God's call, finally stops running away by having sailors throw him off a boat and into a stormy sea?

- A. Noah
- B. Jonah
- C. Paul

What two characters are wrongfully imprisoned, but after an earthquake breaks open the walls to their prison cell, they don't run away, but instead care for their prison guard?

- A. David and Jonathan
- B. Ruth and Naomi
- C. Paul and Silas

Who ignores a decree to only pray to and worship King Darius by continuing to pray to God three times a day only to be thrown into a den of lions as punishment?

- A. Daniel
- B. Elijah
- C. Isaiah

Who convinces Pharaoh to release the Israelites from captivity without ever fighting or running away from Pharaoh?

- A. Samson
- B. Gideon
- C. Moses

Who returns to his brother 20 years after running away from his family because he stole his father's blessing from his older brother?

- A. Isaac
- B. Jacob
- C. Abraham

After being arrested, beaten, and warned to stop speaking about Jesus in the Temple, who returns to the Temple the next day and starts talking about Jesus again?

- A. Peter, James and John
- B. Adam and Eve
- C. Elisha

After refusing to bow down to a statue of King Nebuchadnezzar, who is thrown into a fiery furnace and then proceeds to walk around in it unharmed?

- A. King Solomon
- B. Eli and Samuel
- C. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

Who is sold into slavery, but when given the chance to do the same to his brothers, instead forgives them?

- A. King Hezekiah
- B. Joseph
- C. Namaan

Answers:

- Jonah (he's swallowed by a whale, prays for 3 days, then goes to Nineveh, tells the city about God, and the entire city listens to him)
- Paul and Silas – the prison guard, thinking that the prisoners escaped, was going to kill himself. Paul and Silas stop him and then the guard takes them to his house
- Daniel – he spends the night with the lions and is untouched by them. King Darius the next day refutes the decree and throws his advisors who tricked him into the lions' den the following day. They do not fare nearly as well as Daniel did.
- Moses – we read some of those stories earlier this year
- Jacob – he was called by God to return and see Esau, even though Esau had promised to kill Jacob next time he saw him – we read some of those stories earlier this year
- Peter, James, and John – in the Book of Acts, we see the disciples act very differently than they do in the Gospels. They are very bold and unafraid.
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – this story is very similar to the Daniel and the lion's den – but the names are more fun to say.
- Joseph has the chance to throw his brothers into slavery when they come to Egypt for food, but instead he forgives them -- we read some of those stories earlier this year