

THE REAL JESUS: HIS CROSS

Week One | August 19, 2018 | Jesus: Born to Die

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 18:31–34. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

In order for Jesus to pay for sin and conquer death, He first had to die.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

It was God's plan from the beginning for Jesus to take on human flesh by being born through the line of David and to die on a cross for sinners.

MEDITATE

"See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished" (Luke 18:31).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

There are many counterfeit Jesuses floating around these days. Even though Christianity is on the decline in our society, He is still a popular figure. People have created different versions of Jesus that make Him easier to embrace or allow Him to fulfill a particular need they have. Different images of Jesus serve to make His person and His teaching more palatable and affirming and less controversial or offensive. The Jesuses people claim to worship look eerily like themselves. Rather than being made into Jesus' image, they craft Him into their image. Here are some common versions of Jesus we see:

1. **Guru Jesus** – This Jesus is a good moral teacher who stands next to other religious gurus like the Buddha, Muhammad, and Vishnu. Following Him means seeing Him as an example and following His teaching. As we have already seen, The Real Jesus wasn't a religious revolutionary. He is the God-man who came on a mission.
2. **Macho Jesus** – Some movements have looked to Jesus to help men develop a stronger sense of masculinity, especially in a culture experiencing a crisis of manhood. This hyper-masculine Jesus closely resembles Braveheart, Harrison Ford, or Vin Diesel with His tough talk and take-no-licks kind of life. But the Real Jesus was both tough and tender. He demonstrated the strength of servant leadership and sacrificial love.
3. **The Nationalistic Jesus** – This Jesus is more of a tribal deity who is on one nation's "side" if they do the right things to maintain His favor. It is a widely adopted image of Jesus that goes largely undetected in churches today and can be used as a political mascot or as an "endorsement" of a political party or candidate. What we see in Scripture is that God's plan of redemption centers on Jesus, not on America. The people Jesus died for come from *every* tribe, tongue, and nation, and one day we'll see that glorious sight around the throne! Christians must ultimately set their hope not on their nation, but on the city that is to come, the one whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). Jesus is not in service to one nation or another to be used as a mascot or treated as a tribal deity. All nations are under Him, or as the psalmist says, they are His footstool (Isaiah 66:1).
4. **Marxist Jesus** – It is in vogue to quote Jesus in support of certain progressive views that care more about overthrowing capitalism than salvation from sin. While Jesus does call out corruption and oppression, He does not point to a communistic utopia, but to the kingdom of God where there will be no more corruption and oppression.
5. **The Self-Help Jesus** – This kind of Jesus will fix your life, fix your marriage, help you succeed at work and at parenting. His advice is reduced to easy-to-follow steps and inspirational quotes to help you get through the obstacles of life. The Jesus we see in the Bible doesn't give steps to success. He says, "Come to me" (Matthew 11:28–30).
6. **The Rogue Jesus** – Many people have been burned by the Church and want to get as far away from it as possible, but they still kind of like Jesus. So they want to hold onto Him and let go of the institution of the Church. But Jesus doesn't really give us this option. He came to die *for the Church*. He is the Head *of the Church*. When we are saved, we are part of the body of Christ, the family of God. As Tony Merida puts it, "You cannot say you like Jesus' head and not His body!" If you love Jesus, you learn to love what He loves.

You learn to patiently bear with His bride, as He does.

7. My Homeboy Jesus – This Jesus is your BFF. He is there when times are tough and gives you a high five when they are going well. Like our modern-day definition of a “good friend,” this kind of Jesus supports you in whatever you want to do and whoever you want to be. But the Jesus of the Bible is not someone to take lightly. He is the Holy God, the King of the universe. He doesn’t follow you around; you are called to follow Him as Lord.

8. New Testament Jesus – Many people like to separate the Jesus of the New Testament from the God of the Old Testament, whom they see as angry and violent. They see New Testament Jesus as peaceful, charitable, kind, and non-controversial. They say He is not a God of justice like we see in the Old Testament, but a God of only love and forgiveness, like we see in the New Testament. People with this picture of Jesus clearly have not read either the Old or New Testament well! We see a Holy God of love and justice in both. His love and His justice perfectly met at the cross, where Jesus demonstrated the greatest kind of love by taking God’s just wrath for our sin on Himself.

If you look at each of these counterfeit Jesuses, none of them are “born to die.” They are born to be a good example, born to be an encouragement to us, born to teach us things, or born to show us another way. But none of them are centered on a cross and an empty tomb. We will learn in today’s lesson that Jesus’ death was not a tragic ending or a plan B, it was always God’s plan A.

Lest we become quick to judge other people who do this, let’s spend some time this week examining our own hearts and looking at our own “image” of Jesus in light of the Real Jesus found in the Bible. It is easy to let cultural values or personal preferences color Him in a certain light. But if there is one thing we have learned in this study, it is that the identity of Jesus is central to the Christian faith. We are not called to worship some version of Jesus, we are called to worship the real Jesus. That is why it is so important that we get Him right.

📖 UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Today we will look at a major theme Jesus emphasized as He was preparing for His death. He teaches us how to think about His death by calling our attention to the story of the *whole* Bible, God’s story of redemption.

1. WHY JESUS’ DEATH WAS NECESSARY

2. WHAT JESUS’ DEATH MEANS

GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God’s Word says about this week’s particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week’s biblical truth.

WHY JESUS' DEATH WAS NECESSARY

LUKE 18:31–34

Q: *Can you think of another time Jesus foretold His death?*

Jesus talked about His death throughout His ministry. The first time He mentioned it was back in Luke 9:22, when He said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Then, in Luke 9:44, Jesus says to His disciples, “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” Jesus knew He was born not just to live a life we couldn’t live, but also to die the death we deserved. The cross was not a surprise for Him. It was part of the plan all along, a plan He willingly submitted to (John 6:38). By foretelling His death, Jesus wasn’t being morbid or dramatic. He was pointing to the fact that His death stands at the center of the gospel. In order for sin to be paid for, He had to die. In order to conquer death by raising back to life, He first had to die!

Now, in Luke 18:31–34, Jesus foretells his death a third time. In verse 31, He is once again talking to His disciples, reminding them what the plan is. He wants them to see Him as far more than a good teacher. He is a sacrificial lamb. Understanding Jesus’ death is crucial to knowing who Jesus really is.

In verses 32–33, Jesus repeats what He said in Luke 9:22. He didn’t just tell them He would die. He gave them specifics. He would be delivered over to the Gentiles, or transferred to their custody, under their charge. However, Jesus says in John 10:18, while He was handed over to the authority of wicked people, ultimately His life was not taken from Him. He chose to lay it down. Paul tells us in Romans 8:32 that God was the one who “spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.” In Acts 2:22–23, Peter says Jesus was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” Jesus tells His disciples that when they see Him given over to the power of His enemies, they should recognize there is a power far greater governing all things.

Jesus also tells them He will be mocked, shamefully treated, spit upon, and flogged. He won’t be quietly put to death, He will be hated. He will be reviled and despised. He will suffer the disdain of man. Then He will be killed. Psalm 22, a psalm that foretells Jesus’ death, describes this reality. “For dogs encompass me; the company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me” (Psalm 22:16–17). Jesus told His disciples in advance so that when they witnessed this horror, they would not be caught off guard or give way to despair. All will still be going according to plan.

But, on the third day, Jesus said, He would rise again. Not only did Jesus tell them what to expect, He told them how it would end—He would rise from the dead. When they grieve over what they see, they should not do so as those with no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

- Q: *Looking back at the counterfeit Jesuses we discussed in the introduction, in what way do they not make sense in light of the cross and resurrection? Are those “Jesuses” born to die?*
- Q: *In what way does following Jesus mean following Him down this same path, being despised and rejected and even “crucified” before we are raised with Him? Look up 2 Timothy 2:11 and Matthew 16:24-26.*

WHAT JESUS’ DEATH MEANS

■ LUKE 18:31-34

- Q: *What did the prophecies [e.g., Psalm 22] say Jesus’ death would be like?*
- Q: *Why do you think Jesus refers back to the prophecies about Him? Why would that be significant?*

Luke dedicates one-third of his gospel to the last week of Jesus’ life and his death. This emphasis is important. Luke is not just offering a summary of Jesus’ teachings or a biography of His life. Even in the way He structured his account, he communicates that Jesus is the Lamb of God, born to die and to be raised again.

Jesus’ work on the cross is the centerpiece of the gospel. The history leading up to it and the future after it all hinge on a three-day period in Jerusalem in which Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected. That is why Paul declares that he will “proclaim Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2), because that is the core of the gospel and the necessary foundation for the Christian life. As Ligon Duncan writes, “You see, you cannot understand the Bible, you cannot understand Christianity, you cannot understand the Gospel without understanding Jesus’ death and resurrection.”

Jesus connects His future with what has been prophesied about Him in the past. The cross was not a plan God came up with after 2,000 years of history. He didn't give up His plan A of trying to get the Israelites to follow the Law perfectly and come up with a plan B. No, Jesus has been God's plan A since Genesis 3:15, when God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the snake. God knew fallen humans would never be able to save themselves. They needed a Savior, and God Himself promised to be that Savior.

For the next 2,000 years, God sent prophets to tell the people of this Messiah who would come. The people waited in eager hope and longing for this Redeemer. They knew they would recognize Him by what the prophets said He would be like. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He proved to be the embodiment of every single one of those prophecies. By drawing the disciples' memory back to the prophets, Jesus reminded them of the grand narrative of Scripture, God's story of redemption.

The book of Luke is not isolated in a collection of other books. It is part of one big story spanning from Genesis to Revelation. To understand the book of Luke, you have to read it as part of a larger whole. To make sense of Jesus' death, you have to look at it through God's redemptive plan. Jesus was preparing His disciples because the cross was near. He wanted them to have the right perspective as they witnessed His death. He did not want them to fall into despair or have their faith crushed. He didn't want them to think God had been defeated or had abandoned them. Instead, He wanted them to see that everything was going according to plan.

The disciples responded the same way they responded in Luke 9:45. They had no clue what He was talking about. Maybe it was because they were still enthralled with Him as a good teacher and had visions of Him being an immortal leader. He would be an immortal leader, just not the way they expected. Maybe they just didn't have a category for what He was talking about. After all, how does it make sense for the Son of God to be subjected to such a death? God doesn't die. He certainly cannot be killed! Whatever the reason, they could not comprehend what Jesus was telling them.

As we have seen, the disciples are a work-in-progress, just like the rest of us! Jesus responds to their lack of understanding with patience. Through the last days of His life, Jesus continues to reveal to them the meaning of His death. Eventually, they do get it, but they have a long road to walk with Jesus before they do.

- ❓ *We too should view Jesus and the entirety of life through the lens of God's story of redemption. How can you keep the cross at the center of the way you read the Bible, the way you live your life, and the way you view the world?*

- ❓ *Think back to when you heard the gospel for the first time. What about God's plan of redemption seemed crazy to you? What part of it seemed to not jibe with your categories for how the world works?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- 🔗: *Look back at the counterfeit Jesuses we discussed in the introduction. Are there any others you can think of?*
- 🔗: *Take some time to examine the "Jesus" you believe in and worship. Are there ways in which He looks more like your preferences [lifestyle, political, cultural] than the picture Luke gives us of the Real Jesus?*
- 🔗: *Would you say your life is centered on Christ and Him crucified? If not, what would it look like if it were? How would it change your relationships, your lifestyle, your pursuits, what you do with your money and your time, etc.?*

PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- Father, thank You for not sparing your Son, but giving Him up so I could be reconciled to You.
- Jesus, thank You for sticking with the plan of redemption so I could be saved. At any point You could have called it off, but You didn't. Thank You for loving me like that. Thank You for willingly laying down Your life for me.
- Holy Spirit, show me areas of my life where the gospel is not the center. Let me rejoice in Christ's death and resurrection, and may that joy permeate every part of me.

LUKE 18:32 Jesus being delivered over to the Gentiles connects with how Israel was handed over to the Gentiles in the Old Testament as judgment or punishment for their sins. Jesus being handed over to the Gentiles demonstrates Him taking on the punishment for sins.

LUKE 18:34 Of course the disciples understood the words Jesus was saying. This passage means they didn't "get" how what Jesus told them would fit into God's plan of redemption.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), and Preaching the Word (Luke).*