

## COVENANT — JESUS CHRIST

*The Cross*

### LESSON 12

MAY 24, 2026

#### **LESSON TEXT**

Matthew 27:27–31, 33–37, 45–50

#### **FOCUS VERSES**

Matthew 27:29–31

**<sup>29</sup>And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!**

**<sup>30</sup>And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.**

**<sup>31</sup>And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.**

#### **TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT**

Jesus' death atoned for our sins so we could enter a greater covenant with God.

#### **MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT**

I will believe Jesus' death frees me from the weight of sin.

#### **COVENANT CONTEXT**

All the Old Testament sacrifices and ceremonies have been pointing to this day in history: the day the sinless Lamb of God laid down His own life to save us. This is what we know as the gospel—that Jesus died for us, was buried, and rose from the grave. Because of the gospel, we can be made right with God and brought into a new and better covenant with Him that will stand until Jesus returns for His church.

#### **TEACHING OUTLINE**

**Icebreaker:** What is your favorite hymn or song about the Cross?

**Teacher Tip:** Connect the group's answers to the story of Jesus' atoning death on the cross.

**Lesson Connection:** Share the Lesson Connection. **(I)**

##### I. THE SCOURGING OF JESUS

###### A. Rejected

***DISCUSS:** Since fear of rejection often holds us back from doing what we know we should, what can we learn from Jesus' example when He was rejected?*

###### B. Mocked

C. I will remember that Jesus was humiliated to save me.

***DISCUSS:** Based on Hebrews 12:2, what is the joy that is set before us, and how can we use it to motivate us to self-sacrifice like Jesus did?*

## II. ATONING FOR THE BROKEN COVENANT

A. Jesus Died for Everyone

***DISCUSS:** Share a testimony (yours or someone else's) of God reaching people who were far away from Him.*

B. I will enter into covenant with Jesus. (V)

## III. THE CROSS

A. The Death of the Testator

B. Bondage and Freedom

***DISCUSS:** Before coming to God, if you ever tried to break a sinful habit by your own strength, how different was it when you had God's help?*

C. I will thank Jesus for being bound to make me free.

***DISCUSS:** Even after Jesus sets us free, why do we sometimes still act like we are enslaved by sin?*

### **Internalizing the Message**

#### ***PRAYER FOCUS***

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For us to be thankful for Jesus' sacrifice
- For us to be motivated by Jesus' sacrifice to sacrifice for others

#### ***LESSON CONNECTION***

**(I)** Imagine you are the high priest of ancient Israel. You wake on the tenth day of the seventh month: the Day of Atonement. First you pull on the pure white robe. Then you put on the ephod of blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen, woven through with gold thread. By itself, the ephod is a sight to behold. You put the mitre on your head and make sure its gold plate proclaiming "Holiness to the Lord" is centered at the front. The golden epaulets bearing great jewels engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel rest heavy on your shoulders. More gems, also set in gold, line your chest in rows over your heart. These symbolize how you bear the weight of your people on your shoulders and your heart, especially today.

You reach the Tabernacle and step through the curtained gate into the courtyard. The sacrifices are waiting for you: a bullock and a pair of goats. You cast lots to determine which goat will live and which will die. At the brazen altar, you sacrifice the bullock and one of the goats and collect the blood. You wash at the brazen laver and step into the Holy Place. The golden candlestick lights your way past the table of shewbread. Coals glow bright on the incense altar. Your hands tremble as you approach the great, thick veil that screens off the Holy of Holies. Your heart pounds against the gems on your chest. Tiny golden bells jingle on the hem of your robe, as if Jehovah needs some warning of your approach.

On this day only, you alone may step behind the veil. You slip past it and into the most sacred space in all Israel: the Holy of Holies. The Ark of the Covenant glitters golden before you, the upswept wings of the angels meeting over the Mercy Seat. With bated breath and beating heart, you sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the Mercy Seat and in front of the Ark. If you have not done the offering correctly, if God does not accept your sacrifice, you forfeit your life. But you breathe a sigh to realize you're still alive in the holy presence of God. As you offer a cloud of incense, the presence of God rests on the Mercy Seat, and you know the sacrifice is accepted. The people's sins over the past year have been atoned for. Although they can't be fully forgiven until a sinless sacrifice is offered, this is the best you can do.

With immense relief you step out of the Tabernacle into the sunlit courtyard where the scapegoat is waiting, held by an attendant. You lay your hands on it and confess over it the sins of the people of Israel, and the attendant leads it far out of the camp into the wilderness to be turned loose, symbolically carrying the people's sins far away. The atonement is complete. Israel is at one with God once again—cleansed and still loved. You and your people will live, at least for one more year.

## ***BIBLE LESSON***

### **I. THE SCOURGING OF JESUS**

#### **A. Rejected**

Caiaphas the high priest had very selfish concerns as he stood outside the palace of Pontius Pilate and watched Jesus on trial. Caiaphas was far less concerned with cleansing his people of sin and far more concerned with clearing out this unwanted Messiah figure who was leading the high priest's followers away. So, Caiaphas and his fellow priests worked the crowd into a frenzy. As Pilate demanded, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" the people screamed back, "Let him be crucified." Pilate argued back, "Why, what evil hath he done?" And the people cried out even more, "Let him be crucified" (Matthew 27:22–23). Finally, Pilate washed his hands of the matter and delivered Jesus to be scourged and then crucified.

All of this was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 53:1–7. As prophesied, Jesus was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). As Jesus stood before Pilate, the governor marveled that Jesus refused to make a case in His own defense, but this too was fulfilling Isaiah 53:7. Already bruised, battered, and beaten, the Roman soldiers yanked Jesus over to the whipping post and scourged Him—a horrific and often-deadly punishment. It was so brutal that Pilate seemed to have hoped this vicious torture would satisfy the crowd's bloodlust, but they still demanded Jesus' execution. Even these stripes laid on Jesus' back were fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. (See Isaiah 53:5.) All His suffering had a purpose.

***DISCUSS:** Since fear of rejection often holds us back from doing what we know we should, what can we learn from Jesus' example when He was rejected?*

#### **B. Mocked**

For the Roman soldiers, this trial and execution seemed a novel diversion from the boredom of garrison duty in this backwater province. The entire unit was called together into the common hall for the spectacle. They twisted

together a crown of thorns and pressed it onto Jesus' head, draped a cape around His bleeding shoulders, and put a rod into His hand like a scepter. Then all took a knee before Him and hailed Him as "King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:29). When they were frustrated by Jesus' stoic silence, they tore the rod from His grasp and beat Him over the head to drive the thorns still deeper.

Although these rough Roman soldiers had no knowledge of biblical prophecy, still they were fulfilling it by their actions. They bowed their knees and proclaimed Jesus as King in mockery, but one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (See Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:10–11.) In fact, John recorded in Revelation 1:7: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen."

### **C. I will remember that Jesus was humiliated to save me.**

Why did Jesus endure all of this? Why didn't He summon twelve legions of angels to His defense as He said He easily could? If one angel could decimate 185,000 of King Sennacherib's Assyrian troops by morning, what could twelve legions have done? In a day Jesus could have wiped the mighty Roman Empire off the map. But instead, Jesus "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). But why would He be willing to be humiliated, tortured, and killed? Hebrews 12:2 declares: "Jesus...for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." We are the joy that was set before Him—every man, woman, and child who has ever come to faith in Him. Jesus, who knew the end from the beginning, could look down through the ages and see you sitting in church today. He suffered then so you could be saved now.

***DISCUSS:** Based on Hebrews 12:2, what is the joy that is set before us, and how can we use it to motivate us to self-sacrifice like Jesus did?*

## **II. ATONING FOR THE BROKEN COVENANT**

Atonement was at the heart of Jesus' mission. To atone is to make amends or pay the penalty for wrongdoing. It has also been described as the way by which we can once again be at one with God. All that is true because until our sins are atoned for, repented of, and set aside, they will constantly separate us from the presence of our holy God. God knew we could never atone for our own sins. Even the holy rituals the high priest performed under the old covenant could only roll sins forward one year. They were only acceptable to God because He knew the ultimate, sinless sacrifice of Christ was coming.

### **A. Jesus Died for Everyone**

When the soldiers finally tired of their sport, they laid the heavy timber cross over Jesus' shoulders and led Him through the mob-crowded streets to a rocky hill just beyond the gates of Jerusalem. There they nailed Him to the cross, fulfilling even more prophecy. (See Psalm 22:16.) Then they raised Him between earth and Heaven to suffer and die.

Crucifixion was the most torturous of deaths. It could take days for the victims to die. It was so horrible that one of the chief benefits of being a Roman citizen was exemption from this form of execution. Jesus suffered this torture

for all of humanity. Finally, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). This was more than a cry of despair. It was a reference to Psalm 22, similar to how older hymns are usually named by their first words. Any student of Scripture near the cross would have caught the reference. Doctors of the Law likely could have quoted this psalm by heart. We have to wonder if they were struck by their own fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 22:7–8. As Jesus cried out, “I thirst” and someone offered Him vinegar to drink, did any onlooker think of Psalm 22:15? As the soldiers cast lots for Jesus’ clothes at the foot of the cross, they had no idea they were fulfilling Psalm 22:18.

But perhaps the message Jesus wanted us to hear most clearly, that He surely didn’t have the breath to sing or recite was this: “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee” (Psalm 22:27). In other words, Jesus died for everyone. For those at the ends of the earth, those who feel so far away from God that grace could never reach them, for every kindred, tongue, racial group, and nationality—Jesus died for everyone.

***DISCUSS:** Share a testimony (yours or someone else’s) of God reaching people who were far away from Him.*

#### **B. I will enter into covenant with Jesus.**

In that brutal yet holy moment, the veil in the Temple that had blocked people from entering the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom, as if God Himself had reached down and torn it in half. The veil was inches thick and over six stories high. Scholars have surmised that a team of horses could not have pulled it apart. This dark day was the dawning of the new covenant Jesus promised to bring. All the years of sacrifices and symbolism had their end and fulfillment at the cross.

*“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.” (Hebrews 8:10)*

(V) Every year the high priest had walked, trembling, into the Holy of Holies bearing the blood of bulls and goats. Now in the fulness of time, Jesus entered one single time into the Holy Place and offered His own life’s blood once and for all. No longer would sin merely roll forward year after year. Now every sin could be cleansed instantly and forever by the blood of the sinless Lamb of God. And just as the high priest had carried the names of the tribes of Israel on his shoulders and over his heart, so Jesus carried the weight of the world on His shoulders; we were the burden laid on His heart.

### **III. THE CROSS**

#### **A. The Death of the Testator**

The glory of the cross is not found in the blood-stained timber; it is found in what Jesus accomplished for us that day. His death was the key that unlocked hope for the entire world and ushered in a new covenant with humanity. Hebrews 9:15–17 details how Jesus’ death brought about a new testament. The Scripture likens this to the reading of

a will and the distribution of an inheritance. The will of God was to distribute the gift of salvation to everyone who would believe and obey the gospel. But just as children do not receive their inheritance until their parents die, for God's will to take effect, there had to be the death of the testator, or the one who had written the will. Jesus was "the mediator of the new testament," or covenant with humanity. He died so "they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15).

### **B. Bondage and Freedom**

Without Jesus Christ we were sentenced to be slaves to sin. The world loves to proclaim that the sinful life is a life of freedom, but alcoholics (being honest) would tell you how hard it is to quit drinking. Ask those addicted to drugs, sexual immorality, cigarettes, or pornography how easy it is to break free. Ask workaholics to cut back from their eighty-hour work weeks. Ask gluttons how easily they can quit excessive eating. It is so hard to stop because revolts are never easy. The ruler always tries to crush the revolt and whip his subjects back into line. It is often less painful to accept the shackles and tread one more time around in a circle pushing the devil's millstone, like Samson—blind, weak, and bound, trapped in the cycle.

***DISCUSS:** Before coming to God, if you ever tried to break a sinful habit by your own strength, how different was it when you had God's help?*

But Jesus came to change all that. We who once were servants to sin are now set free. And Jesus didn't just free us, He also adopted us as His sons and daughters. Now we are heirs of that eternal inheritance Jesus' death purchased for us. We are not just set free and turned loose into the world to fend for ourselves. We are adopted as children of the King, brought into His kingdom, and will one day be seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

### **C. I will thank Jesus for being bound to make me free.**

When the mob came for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, He surrendered willingly, yet they bound His hands. He did not raise a hand to defend Himself. He did not run from the flogging post. Bands of love for us held Jesus to the cross far more firmly than any nails ever could. How much gratitude should we feel toward the one who was bound to make us free? All He asks in return is for us to accept that freedom. How heartbreaking it must be for Jesus to have gone through all that and still have so many people reject the freedom and grace He gives.

***DISCUSS:** Even after Jesus sets us free, why do we still sometimes act like we are enslaved by sin?*

***Teacher Option:** Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how some people choose bondage over freedom although Jesus offers freedom.*

### **INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE**

The term *institutionalization* is used to describe the state of prisoners who have spent so much time in the prison system that they have difficulty adjusting to freedom after their release. In some cases they would prefer not to leave the prison at all. This is incredible considering the terrible quality of life on the inside. Life is monotonous and strictly regimented most of the time with moments of brutality, humiliation, and terror. One would think prisoners

would be counting down the days to their release with hash marks on the walls.

Yet some prisoners are literally forced to change into civilian clothes and then kicked out of the prison against their will. One inmate told of a woman who, when forced to leave the prison she had called home for many years, went out the same day and committed a robbery, allowed herself to be caught, pled guilty, and was immediately sent back to prison. A prison guard told of a man who had been incarcerated for thirty-seven years, and once he was released, spent three weeks living with his daughter. When he ran out of money and did not want to become a burden, he donned a ski mask, took a sawed-off shotgun, drove to a local convenience store, and sat in the car for eight hours waiting for someone to call the police to arrest him and put him back in jail.

It boggles the mind of anyone who has not experienced institutionalization, but bondage to sin and Satan is much the same. The sinful life is often painful but still comfortable—frightening, yet familiar. Old habits die hard. We grow attached to our chains. We feel safe behind our bars. We can fear the unknown outside the prison walls. What will our life be like if we put all our faith in Jesus Christ? Will it be worse out there than it is in here?

Jesus paid the price for every one of us to be free. He purchased our pardon on Calvary. He died to set us free. Whoever the Son sets free is truly free. And He assures us He has a far better life awaiting us outside the devil's high fences and razor wire. Jesus promises abundant life in this world and eternal life in the world to come. Jesus was brave enough to be bound so we could be free. Will you be brave enough to leave the chains behind and walk through the prison gates He has broken?