

## *The Refiner's Fire*

# **Christ in the Crucible**

Lesson #13 for December 29, 2007

Scriptures: Matthew 2:1-18; 27:51,52; Luke 2:7,22-24;22:41-44; John 8:58,59; Romans 6:23; Titus 1:2.

1. This lesson focuses on Christ's final sufferings and death as "our Substitute and Surety" in the plan of salvation. What was Christ's greatest suffering? Did He suffer for our sins? What should we learn from that suffering? Do any of us in our modern, comfortable settings really suffer? Does God expect us to suffer? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. As we know, the life of Christ was under threat almost from the day He was born. At first, it was Herod the Great. (Matthew 2:1-18) Later, it was the evil influences in Nazareth. (John 1:46) Was it only by divine intervention that Christ survived those pressures? Did the Devil really believe he could destroy that infant baby?
3. Why did the parents of Jesus move to Nazareth? Was it easier for Jesus to grow up in a town where many people—including His peers—were considered to be sinners—at the "bottom of the barrel"? Or would it have been easier for Him to grow up in a setting where everyone was trying to be good—where He might have been tempted to blend in?
4. What was it like to live a sinless life in a very sinful environment? How did His living that sinless life prepare Him for what was coming in Gethsemane and on Calvary?
5. Ellen White suggested that Christ's character was so pure that it was painful for Him to observe sin in action. (DA 88.1) Do our sins pain us? How did He feel as He grew up in sinful Nazareth or later as He was in discussion with the scribes and Pharisees? (John 8)
6. In light of the great controversy, we believe that sin began before this world was created. God chose to create His children—both angels and human beings—with freedom. Did God know when He did this that, sooner or later, someone would rebel? Was the fall inevitable?
7. We believe that God is omniscient. Included in that omniscience is His ability to understand and predict the future. If God already knew exactly how all the details of the experiences in Gethsemane and Calvary would work out, was there really any risk involved? Could Jesus actually have failed? **What would have been the consequences if Jesus had succumbed to temptation and sinned even once? What if Jesus had just decided to leave and go back to heaven?**
8. For those who focus particularly on the issues in the great controversy, the life and death of Christ were primarily God's way of dealing with the accusations and questions raised by Lucifer/Satan in the great controversy. How do these "larger issues" in the great controversy impact us individually in our lives in 2007? Does understanding the issues in the great controversy and God's answers to those questions and accusations help you to live a better life, day by day?
9. During His ministry, Jesus was subjected to all types of challenges. He was accused of doing His work through the power of the Devil. (Matthew 12:22-24) Those with whom He grew up wanted to kill Him because He suggested that His life was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. (Luke 4:21-30) And when He entered into discussion with the spiritual leaders of the nation, they decided very early in His ministry that He must be put to death. (John 5:18;

8:58,59) Have any of us been in a setting where our life was threatened? What would it be like to have a nationwide manhunt for you?

10. Read Matthew 23:37. Jesus desperately wanted to reach out and touch the lives of His Jewish “children.” But they were determined to reject Him and kill Him, if possible. What would it be like to have those you desperately love want to kill you? Read how God felt about being rejected. (Hosea 11:8,9)
11. Will we ever be called to go through the kind of experiences that Jesus went through? What would the Devil do to us today if he had free reign? Are we preparing our lives—by careful Bible study, prayer, and active Christian witnessing—to face such times in the future?
12. Look once again at the story of Jesus in Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:33-36; Luke 22:41-44; *Desire of Ages* 686) The disciples could see that Jesus was undergoing some kind of experience that they did not understand. What did they think as they heard the words of Jesus in the garden?
13. The Father and the Son both knew what was coming on that final weekend. What did They do to prepare Themselves?

In those dreadful hours **He had relied upon the evidence of His Father's acceptance heretofore given Him.** He was acquainted with the character of His Father; He understood His justice, His mercy, and His great love. By faith He rested in Him whom it had ever been His joy to obey. And as in submission He committed Himself to God, the sense of the loss of His Father's favor was withdrawn. **By faith, Christ was victor.** {DA 756.3}

Did His divinity make His struggle easier or more difficult? What can we learn from His experiences that should help us to prepare for what is coming?

14. It is difficult for us to imagine the physical pain that Christ went through from Gethsemane to Calvary. We cannot imagine that kind of pain. But, going way beyond that was the suffering that He experienced! Ellen White suggested that His physical pain was hardly felt:

All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. **The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.** {DA 753.1}

15. What evidence is there that more than human events were taking place in Gethsemane and at Calvary? How do we explain the earthquake, the darkness, and the “curtain torn from top to bottom”? Is there any possible “natural” explanation for those events?
16. Christ suffered incredibly. It was more than human suffering! When He recognized the implications and the results of His struggle *for the entire universe*, it must have been overwhelming. At the same time, we must recognize the Devil's desperate struggle because he knew that if Christ succeeded, he was eternally doomed. During those desperate hours, what was Satan trying to accomplish?
17. Ellen White wrote a great deal about our “Substitute and Surety.” What do we mean when we

say that Christ was the great “Substitute”? Read Isaiah 53:4. “But he endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have born. All the while we thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God.” (GNB) How do you understand those words? What do we mean when we say that Christ “earned the right to our salvation”?

18. Read 1 Peter 2:21-24. What does it mean to say, “Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by his wounds that you have been healed.” (v. 24, GNB) This is what Christian scholars have called “mystical language.” Is there a sense in which we, together with Christ, died on Calvary? Is there a sense in which our sins were somehow placed “on” Him? Can sins be transferred? Is it possible to make Jesus “guilty” for our sins? Did Jesus ever feel guilty?
19. What does it mean to cast our burden upon the Lord? (Psalm 55:22) Are those sins?
20. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* concludes:

According to Scripture, God’s wrath against sin, our sin, was poured out upon Jesus. Jesus on the cross suffered not [only] sinful humanity’s unjust wrath but a righteous God’s righteous indignation against sin, the sins of the whole world. As such, Jesus suffered something deeper, darker, and more painful than any human being could ever know or experience. (Wednesday, December 26, 2007) ([...] supplied)
21. Can we explain those words in ordinary human terms? What do we mean when we say that God’s wrath was “poured out on Him”? As recorded in Matthew 27:46, what did He cry? (Compare Romans 1:18,24,26,28; 4:25)
22. Do you agree with these words from the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*:

Whatever our sufferings here, thanks to Jesus, thanks to His bearing in Himself the punishment of our sin, thanks to the great provision of the gospel—that through faith we can stand perfect in Jesus right now—we have the promise of eternal life. (Thursday, December 27, 2007)
23. On the same page, we are told that Christ suffered not only personally but also “corporately” for us all. What does that mean?
24. “All the suffering which is the result of sin was poured into the bosom of the sinless Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, page 129.
25. Read *Desire of Ages* pages 690, 693. Christ made the decision that *no matter what the consequences to Himself since He could not see through the portals of the tomb*, He would give up His eternal existence for our sakes. Did He know for sure that we could be saved because of His sacrifice? By the time He gave that cry, “It is finished,” did He recognize that the Father had accepted His sacrifice? (See #14 above)
26. Are we prepared to stand alone against the worst that the Devil can throw at us at the end of time? Are we prepared to see our world torn apart and destroyed in the Devil’s desperate efforts to destroy God’s people?
27. Do we have enough confidence in God’s ability to save us despite the Devil’s efforts so that we can “stand tall” and “speak the truth” about God—even in those desperate times?

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