

# The Chief Priests

## Lesson At-A-Glance

Scripture Reference  
**Matthew 21:23-32**

Church Season  
**Pentecost**

Lesson Focus  
**We can change our ways.**

Bible Memory Verse  
**[The son] answered, "I will not"; but later he changed his mind and went. Matthew 21:29**



Tear here for easy use!

### Gather (10 minutes)

|  | Spark Resources    | Supplies     |
|--|--------------------|--------------|
| <b>Arrival Activity</b><br>Kids practice affirmative thinking by playing a silly game. | Activity Pages<br> | Pencils      |
| <b>Opening Conversation</b><br>Kids talk about a subject on which they have expertise. | Leaflets           | None         |
| <b>Opening Prayer</b><br>Kids undo a knot of knowing in prayer.                        | None               | Ball of yarn |

### Open the Bible (20 minutes)

|   | Spark Resources                              | Supplies     |
|---|--|--------------|
| <b>The Chief Priests Story</b><br>Kids unravel and wrap up the story by passing it around.                  | Spark Bibles, Spark Bible Stickers           | Ball of yarn |
| <b>Good Questions</b><br>Kids communicate using good questions.   | Leaflets                                     | Pencils      |
| <b>Pressure Cooker</b><br>Kids imagine what it was like for Jesus to be pressured by questions.             | Leaflets                                     | Pencils      |
| <b>Rhyme Scheme</b><br>Kids think about how things can seem to work together but mean two different things. | Leaflets                                     | Pencils      |
| <b>Remember It</b><br>Kids memorize the Bible Memory Verse.   | Spark Bibles, Spark Bible Stickers, Leaflets | None         |


# Lesson At-A-Glance

## Activate Faith (10 minutes)

|   | Spark Resources | Supplies |
|---|-----------------|----------|
| <b>A Changing Story</b><br>Kids learn about a life that was changed.                        | Leaflets        | None     |
| <b>Elder-vator</b><br>Kids think about the elders in their church who can answer questions. | Leaflets        | Pencils  |

Tear here for easy use!

## Send (5 minutes)

|   | Spark Resources   | Supplies           |
|---|---|--------------------|
| <b>Closing Conversation</b><br>Kids talk about the difference between knowing, perceiving, and recognizing. | Spark Bibles, Leaflets  | None               |
| <b>Closing Prayer</b><br>Kids work together to write their own responses to a prayer.                       | Family Pages<br> | Whiteboard, marker |



Visit [www.sparksundayschool.org](http://www.sparksundayschool.org) for more Spark content! Watch a short Lesson Prep Video that will prepare you and give you confidence to explore this Bible story with the kids you are leading. You will also find four downloadable resources for this lesson: an Activity Page, a Family Page, and two additional in-class activities.

# Gather (10 minutes)

## Arrival Activity

If some kids arrive earlier than others and you need a lesson-based activity, make copies of the downloadable Activity Page and set them out for kids to try.

When kids have arrived, have them stand in a circle for this warm-up game. Explain to the group that this game is called the Yes game; we'll practice supporting each other and being open to new ideas.

The rules are simple: The leader starts by saying, **Hey**, [call out a name]! and the kid named says, "YES?!?" The leader says, **List five things that we would find in** [name a place] **(for example, your mom's car, your locker at school, your toaster)!!!**

After each item the kid lists in response, the group shouts, "YES!!!!" as if it's the best answer ever, even if that thing is incorrect, silly, or ridiculous. After the fifth item is listed, everyone cheers loudly. Then the kid takes a turn asking someone else about items that would be found somewhere else.

Here's an example of how this game might go:

Leader: **Hey Madison!**

Madison: "YES?!?"

L: **List five things you would find in your socks!**

M: "MY FEET!"

Group: "YES!"

M: "YOGURT!"

G: "YES!"

M: "ROLLIE FINGERS, 1970'S RELIEF PITCHER FOR THE OAKLAND ATHLETICS!"

G: "YES!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

M: "MY TOES!"

G: "YES!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

M: "THE TITANIC!"

G: "YES!!!!!! HOORAY!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

M: "Hey, Horatio! Name five things you would find in your pocket!"

Once you've finished this ridiculous (but fun) game, say,

**Today we're learning about being able to change our minds. Sometimes that involves saying "Yes!" even if it's an idea we're not used to. The first step in changing our minds is unlearning the stuff we think we know.**

### Spark Resources

Activity Pages



### Supplies

Pencils

Tear here for easy use!

## Opening Conversation

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**Who was able to try a Faith on the Go! activity this past week? Tell us what you did.** Allow some time for sharing.

Spark Resources  
Leaflets

**Who can tell me the Bible Memory Verse from last week?** If kids remember the BMV, invite them to recite it as a group. Guide kids to help them remember parts they don't.

Supplies  
None

Distribute leaflets. **Look at the picture of the teacher on the front page.**

- **If you had to guess, what would you say is going on in this classroom? What seems strange?**
- **If you were going to raise your hand to talk about any subject, what would it be? What's something you're an expert on?** Pick a few kids to go into greater detail, to show their expertise.
- **Have you ever been sure you were right about something, only to be proven wrong? How did it feel?**
- **Did you keep thinking the way you used to think, or did you change your tune?**
- **How can we be open to the possibility of being wrong and changing our minds, even if we think we're an expert on the subject? Why is that an important way to live?**

**We're allowed to have dignity—the ability to stick to our convictions when we still think we're right. But God also wants us to practice humility—openness to the possibility that we're wrong. But that can be tough.**

## Opening Prayer

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Before this activity, or during the opening conversation, tie enough knots in the yarn that each kid in the group will have something to untie. Instruct kids to work at untying these knots while you pray an opening prayer.

Spark Resources  
None

**God, we're knotted up with fear . . . anger . . . and certainty.  
You have the power to undo the ropes we've tied around our sinful selves.  
Today, open up our minds to your Word.  
And when we can't undo what we've done, forgive us, too.  
In your name.  
Amen.**

Supplies  
Ball of yarn

*Tear here for easy use!*

# Open the Bible (20 minutes)

## The Chief Priests Story

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Tear here for easy use!

**In today's story, it seems like things are about to unravel, but Jesus pulls it all back together.** Have kids sit in a circle, and find Matthew 21:23-32 on page 1085 in the Spark Bible. Explain that you'll read the first verse in the story, then (while holding onto an end of yarn) pass the yarn ball to a kid across the circle from you. He or she will read the next verse and repeat the process.

Once the story is complete, everyone will have at least one section of yarn to hold.

**A lot of things unravel in today's story. Who has to change the way they think?** (*the elders and chief priests*) **Whose story does Jesus unwrap/refer to?** (*John the Baptist*)

**Unraveling the way people think can be a tricky process, but Jesus gets things back on track by getting to the point—prostitutes and tax collectors who change are headed into God's kingdom, and the churchy folks are falling behind. This would have been backwards thinking for Jesus' hearers. Let's wrap this story up by reading it backwards.**

Repeat the process by starting at the end of the story, reading it verse by verse (in reverse) and passing the ball back while rewrapping it.

**Spark Resources**  
Spark Bibles  
Spark Bible Stickers

**Supplies**  
Ball of yarn

## Good Questions

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This activity will get kids up out of their seats while thinking about today's story. Have the kids form two lines on either side of a central "stage." Explain that you'll be playing an acting game in which the two kids in a scene can speak only in questions. Give the first pair a setting (like a fast food restaurant) and a problem (they're out of ketchup). Then let them act out a story—the first kid to make a statement instead of a question (or who takes too long to come up with a question) gets "buzzed" by you, and has to move to the end of the line, being replaced by the next kid. The dialogue could go like this:

"Will you pass the ketchup?"

"Do you see any ketchup?"

"How can a place like this not have ketchup?"

"Do you really need ketchup?"

"How can I eat a burger without ketchup?"

"Have you ever tried before?"

"Why would I do that?"

**Spark Resources**  
Leaflets

**Supplies**  
Pencils

When everyone's had a turn acting (or when you feel the game is losing steam), you can either change the scene or call it quits. Have kids sit back down and open their leaflets to the third page, where they will find Good Questions. Ask a volunteer to read the instructions and have kids complete the assignment.

**In today's story, people are asking Jesus questions to try to trip him up. This happens a lot.**

- **How does Jesus answer the question he's asked?** *(with another question)* **How do you think Jesus feels about questions?**
- **What are some good reasons for asking questions of Jesus?** *(if we really want to know something, or want to learn)* **What kind of questions are dishonest?** *(the kind that have a sinister motive)*

**Now, take the question you wrote down, and change one word to make it ask something totally different. What word did you change?**

**Jesus doesn't want people to stop asking questions—he wants us to ask better questions, for the right reasons. This is change we can live with!**

## Pressure Cooker

Here's another human interaction game that can be done at any time. Ask kids to find Pressure Cooker on the third page of the leaflet.

Put kids into groups of three, and have them stand shoulder to shoulder in three-person lines. Have the kids on each end of the line think of one food they know how to make and how they would tell someone to make it, including the ingredients and the steps involved. It's the job of the kid in the middle of the trio to listen as the other two tell him or her their recipe at the *same time*, and remember as many details as he or she can. When the two recipe givers are finished, have the middle listener write down as many details as he or she can on the recipe cards in the leaflet. Repeat, switching roles.

- **What was the hardest part about this activity?** *(Probably it was listening to two people at once!)* **For kids who had turns later, did it get easier or harder once you'd heard someone's recipe once before, or were you paying attention back then?**
- **Take a look at the picture on the front of your leaflets. How do you think Jesus handled being asked questions all the time? Did he ignore people, or try to teach them anyway?**
- **How can we handle questions like Jesus did?**

**Spark Resources**  
Leaflets

**Supplies**  
Pencils

## Rhyme Scheme

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Have kids complete Rhyme Scheme on the second page of the leaflet at their own pace, working together to find these “rhyming antonyms.” You can help, too! Give big encouragement to those who figure out answers, especially if someone can find more than one answer that works. You could also suggest the added challenge of kids thinking up their own “rhyming antonyms.”

Answer Key

Hi - BYE

Tall - SMALL

Deny - SUPPLY

Thrill - CHILL

Construction - DESTRUCTION

Lazy - CRAZY

**“Chief priests” is another example of words that (sort of) rhyme but might mean opposite things. The priests in today’s story certainly thought they were the chiefs—they wanted to *be* the authority and *have* authority.**

### Spark Resources

Leaflets

### Supplies

Pencils

Tear here for easy use!

## Remember It

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Ask kids to look up Matthew 21:29 on page 1085 in the Spark Bible. They can also look at the last page of the leaflet. Read the verse together, substituting “The son” for “He” at the beginning of the verse.

**As we read the memory verse again, we are going to repeat three key phrases three times each. It will be like there is an echo in the room. The three phrases are: I will not; changed his mind; and went.**

Read the verse through a couple of times as follows: **The son answered, “I will not” [I will not, I will not, I will not]; but later he changed his mind [changed his mind, changed his mind, changed his mind] and went [and went, and went, and went].**

Once the verse is memorized, invite kids to put I Memorized It stickers in their Bibles.

### Spark Resources

Spark Bibles

Spark Bible Stickers

Leaflets

### Supplies

None

# Activate Faith (10 minutes)

## A Changing Story

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A Changing Story on the last page of the leaflet will inspire some kids and challenge others to ask tough questions. When you've read this story, either together or out loud, ask,

- **Do you think Mr. Rideau really changed while he was in prison? What makes you say that?**
- **If you think he did change, what are some things that might have contributed to that? If he only changed to get out of prison, is that okay?**
- **Are there people who might have been upset that he was let out of prison? Who might that be? Who might have been happy about it?**
- **How do we know when someone has really changed? Can we?**
- **How can we help good change reach people in desperate places?**
- **Are we responsible for changing the lives of other people? (no) Can God do that through us? (Yes!)**

### Spark Resources

Leaflets

### Supplies

None

## Elder-vator

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**The church elders we hear about in today's story aren't that respectable. They use their authority to question Jesus' authority before they really knew him.**

Have kids find Elder-vator on the second page of the leaflet and work as a group to think of people in your own church who have earned the respect of the community. Then, think of questions you could ask them to learn about how they see themselves as a part of your church.

- **Do you think these respectable people have ever had to change the ways they thought or acted? How do you think they handled that?**
- **In today's story, Jesus seems to say that it's easier (or more likely) for a "bad" person to change his or her ways than it is for someone who's seen as "good." Why do you think that is?**
- **How can we change our ways? What are some things that are hard to change, because we've convinced people that they're "good" things to do?**

### Spark Resources

Leaflets

### Supplies

Pencils

Tear here for easy use!



# Send (5 minutes)

## Closing Conversation

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**Do you think the church leaders in today's story really wanted to know God? Why? Is it possible to want to know God so much that we're unwilling to listen to other points of view? How can that change?**

**In today's story, the chief priests wanted to *know* so much about God that they were unable to *recognize* that God was among them in Jesus.**

Take a look at Look it Up! on the third page of the leaflet. It will provide one final insight into the nature of knowing God and God's ability to do new things! Isaiah 43:18-21 is on page 783 in the Spark Bible.

Invite kids to find Faith on the Go! on the last page of the leaflet. Encourage them to complete the assignment and report back next week.

Spark Resources  
Spark Bibles, Leaflets

Supplies  
None

Tear here for easy use!

## Closing Prayer

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For this closing prayer, write these prayer petitions (requests) on the board ahead of time, and instruct kids to work together to come up with a response that they'll say each time. Like the chief priests, their answer may be akin to "We do not know," but as long as they agree on it, that's a prayer.

**We've been slaves to our own authority, God . . .** (Kids respond.)

**We come to you with questions, hoping for our own answers, and that ties us in knots, God . . .** (Kids respond.)

**If you call us to go and work in your kingdom today, God . . .** (Kids respond.)

**Amen.**

Be sure to send a leaflet and a Family Page home with each kid.

Spark Resources  
Family Pages



Supplies  
Whiteboard  
Marker