

Use “The Scene” to introduce “The Thief on the Cross” the High School Sunday school lesson for October 21, 2018. The lesson is found on page 49 of *High School Teacher* by Standard Publishing.

the SCENE

Viewing the latest news through the lens of Scripture

Pastor Andrew Brunson was just released this week after being detained in Turkey for more than two years. The pastor is a U.S. citizen from Black Mountain, North Carolina, and had been serving as a pastor of a church in Turkey for more than 23 years without having problems with the Turkish authorities. Then he was arrested and later tried for the crime of what they termed as “Christianization,” and locked away from his family and friends for two years. In prison, his health suffered, and he quickly lost 50 lbs.

Originally the prosecution was seeking a sentence of 35 years—which would have been a virtual life sentence for the 50-year-old man. Pastor Brunson endured a trial of sorts for months, with many delays and false witnesses being brought against him. The American Center for Law & Justice took up his case and represented him, bringing his case to the attention of the U.S. Congress and the president. In July he was released to house arrest and, after pressure was put on the Turkish officials, the pastor was freed to return to the United States.

On his release, he met with the president and prayed over him, asking God for wisdom for the leader of the U.S. He also expressed his gratitude to all who worked on his behalf to gain his freedom. He spoke of losing hope at times during his imprisonment, but he was able to hear through his wife on her visits to him that many people were praying for him and he knew God was with him, which allowed him to keep hoping for good to prevail. Brunson said that despite the barriers of culture, language, and religion, he was treated well by his fellow prisoners.

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the above to read. After all teens have had the opportunity to read the article, discuss it in this way:

What do you think about this story? Should U.S. Christians be arrested in other countries if it is against the law to preach about Christ?

How do you think you would have felt if you were in Pastor Brunson’s place? What would you do?

Pastor Brunson was arrested for his faith, but he did not give up on God and he has spoken of his gratitude and praised God since his release. What in your life causes your faith to waver or stops you from telling others about Jesus? How does hearing Pastor Brunson’s story affect your thinking about your faith?

It might be hard for Pastor Brunson to forgive those officials who treated him unfairly. It is often very hard to forgive people who have hurt us and to see them through the light of our faith. But Jesus is willing to forgive anyone who has been unkind to Him—in fact He does it over and over again. Let’s take a look at Jesus forgiving a man convicted of a capital crime.



MEETING GOD FACE-TO-FACE

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