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# A Hope Big With

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Of all the people immortalized over millennia upon the pages of history, Jesus of Nazareth had the shortest period of public labor. Only three and a half years.

But what a three and a half years they were!

Socrates taught for 40, Plato for 50, Aristotle for 40, Jesus for not even 4. Yet the impact of Christ's short ministry infinitely exceeds that of the combined 130 years of those three Greek giants.

Someone once wrote that "the grandest paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci are but a reflection of Jesus, the Light of the world. Haydn, Handel, Bach, and Mendelssohn gave to the world their best melodies in the symphonies and oratorios they

*Christ's appeal . . .  
is universal,  
transcending all  
political, ethnic,  
and cultural  
borders.*

wrote to glorify Jesus Christ. Art, culture, music, philosophy—all have been enriched by His teachings. But Christ offers far more than philosophy, art, and music. These cannot save. Jesus offers light and life and salvation to sinful men."

That statement, however eloquent, falls short of doing justice to the richness of Jesus, for that quote is in the context of the West only; Christ's appeal, in contrast, is universal, transcending all political, ethnic, and cultural borders.

"You should search the Bible," Ellen G. White writes, "for it tells you of Jesus. As you read the Bible, you will see the matchless charms of Jesus. You will fall in love with the Man of Calvary, and at every step you can say to the world, 'His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace.' You are to represent Christ to the world. You may show to the world that you have a hope big with immortality"—*Life Sketches*, p. 293.

With Jesus at its center, Christianity is also a historical religion, meaning that it revolves around a person whose life and work are amenable to historical study and analysis. Yet, at the same time, we

# *Immortality*

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cannot circumscribe Jesus Christ within the confines of history. For the reality of His person is suprahistorical (above history)—there’s a point beyond which historical analysis cannot probe. History cannot take us into the mysteries of salvation, or into the wonders of what Christ’s death offers the world. For all that history offers, it cannot begin to fathom what Ellen G. White called “a hope big with immortality.”

This quarter centers on Jesus, on who He was, on what He taught, on what He did—and on what He *is doing* now. That last clause, “on what He is doing now,” makes all the difference in the world. It is what might be called “the mystery of the present tense,” a crucial element that distinguishes Jesus from every other historical figure, for what other historical figure, no matter how great, is doing anything for us now?

Who was this amazing Jesus? What was He like? What did He do while here? What is He, indeed, doing for us now? And finally, why should He be a concern for people in the twenty-first century?

The answers, as we will see, are far from academic. On the contrary, they affect the destiny of every human being.

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## Growing Pains

The Adventist Church in Central America is large—3 million—and still growing, thanks in large part to faithful lay workers. Pastors often shepherd dozens of churches, making it necessary to leave the week-to-week church work to the members. Properly trained lay workers have taken over much of the evangelism efforts throughout the region.

The program works so well that many areas, such as Mexico, are suffering growing pains. Many congregations meet in homes and rented halls because they don't have a church.

They are part of a winning team, and I want to help these believers have the training and tools they need to continue their good work. I'm glad that part of our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help equip even more lay workers to become successful lay leaders in their churches and small groups. For me, it's personal.

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# Who Was Jesus?



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 16:13–16, John 20:26–28, 1 Cor. 1:18–27, 15:3–7.*

**Memory Text:** “When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’” (Matthew 16:13, NIV).

From the earliest days of His ministry, there was discussion and debate about Jesus. How interesting that those discussions continue, even today. They began with the people of His own times and from His own town. “‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?’ they asked. ‘Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary . . . ?’” (*Matt. 13:54, 55, NIV*).

It is what might be called *the scandal of the particular*: The Messiah had to come from somewhere, all right, but not from a place so familiar to us, and certainly not from a family that is just like the rest of ours! In one form or another, the same fundamental concerns expressed by these local townspeople concerning His identity have framed the debate about Jesus across the centuries, heightening the mystique around Him.

Who, indeed, was Jesus? Why was He confused with other prominent Jewish characters? What were the challenges to Jesus’ integrity and identity in the centuries following the New Testament era? How convinced were the Bible writers of His identity, and why? These are some of the questions that our first week’s lesson will examine.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 5.*

## Not the Baptist *(Matt. 16:14)*

The question raised by Jesus' own townsfolk (*Matt. 13:54, 55*) came up repeatedly during His public ministry, and in a variety of ways, as people in the different areas of Palestine encountered Him. Thus, as He went through the region of Caesarea Philippi with His disciples, some six months or so before the final showdown of His life, He felt the need to draw them out on the critical question of the day: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (*Matt. 16:13, NIV*).

**Read** the disciples' response in Matthew 16:14. What does this say about their familiarity with the theological questions of the day? Why do you think Jesus wanted to bring up this issue at this specific time?

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The report on what people were saying about Jesus probably provides insight into how different individuals and groups experienced His ministry in their own setting. How was it possible for some to think that Jesus could be John the Baptist when the two were contemporaries? And what aspects of Jesus' ministry may have resembled that of the Baptist?

**For** possible answers, consider the following passages:

*Matt. 3:1–3; 4:12, 13, 17; 14:1, 2; Mark 1:1–5.*

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Today, of course, we hardly can understand how it was possible to confuse Jesus with John the Baptist. But given the absence of mass communication in the first century and the abundance of secondhand information and rumor, confusion came easily. After all, the ministries of John and Jesus were not without parallels, as the passages above show. But those who had actually encountered John should have been left with no uncertainty (*Matt. 3:11, 12; Mark 1:6–8*).

**It is easy to look back at the mistakes of others and wonder how they could have done what they did. What lessons can we learn from watching these mistakes that can help protect us from making the same kinds of mistakes?**



## Not Elijah or Jeremiah or Some Other Prophet

Read again Matthew 16:14. That people should mistake Jesus for John is one thing. But for Elijah? Or Jeremiah? Or some other Old Testament prophet? Where did such ideas come from?

Elijah was the fearless prophet of Mount Carmel fame, the fire-brand who had the temerity to confront Israel's recalcitrant king and demonic wife. He was the one who held forth alone against the combined religious establishment in Ahab's corrupt regime (*see 1 Kings 18*).

Jeremiah ("the weeping prophet"), coming upon the scene at a time of intense national ferment and crisis, conveyed a message to his compatriots that could not have been more unwelcome to the national mood—and he paid for it, too (*Jer. 20:1, 2, 7, 8*).

As for the rest of God's faithful prophets in the Old Testament, Jesus in His scathing woes upon the scribes and Pharisees left Israel's treatment of these godly stalwarts for the last, as if to suggest that it was the central point He wished to make: " 'So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets' " (*Matt. 23:31, NIV*).

**What** significance do you see in the fact that Jesus' contemporaries identified Him with these particular personalities?

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To have been mistaken for any of the characters included in Peter's response in Matthew 16:14 was clearly a high compliment. These were spiritual giants whose sterling character held deep resonance in Jewish society. But however flattering, such comparisons (as we have come to know) fell utterly short of truth. If Jeremiah had said, for instance, that he was the light of the world, history would have considered him demented. And however spectacular the victory on Carmel, had Jesus quailed in the face of threat, as did the ancient hero of Carmel, we now would not be falling at His feet in reverence. The confusion of Jesus with these ancient stalwarts, however gratifying and intriguing, falls completely short of the reality portrayed in the Gospels.

**What is the main difference between Jesus and all these other prophets, and why is that difference so important to us?** (*See John 1:1–5, 17:5, Heb. 1:1–3.*)

## The Fascination Continues: Part 1

The New Testament does not speculate about Jesus. It simply presents Him as the divine Son of God. Nor does it answer the numerous concerns about Jesus' being and person that would occupy succeeding generations. Yet, in all the discussions and arguments, there was a rock-bottom acceptance of the centrality of Scripture and the basic identity of Jesus Christ.

But the so-called Age of Enlightenment (of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) would change all that. No longer would Scripture constitute the foundation of discourse about Jesus. Instead, new methods and criteria being applied to the study of other ancient documents also would be applied to the Bible. With everything now subject to rational analysis and criticism, supernaturalism, a foundational presupposition of biblical faith, was rejected. The traditional biblical view of a human race steeped in sin and needing divine rescue was replaced by humanism, an optimistic belief in human capacity and progress.

The change of outlook was so radical and far-reaching that many thought they were witnessing the end of Christianity. Religion was considered obsolete, and reason, once the handmaid of theology, became its acknowledged mistress. The result was that the focus now shifted from the Jesus described in the Gospels, the Jesus of our salvation, to the historical Jesus, supposedly the real Jesus as He actually existed without the theological baggage superimposed by the Gospels and later Christian piety. In other words, this Jesus, whoever He was, surely was not the Savior of the world.

**As you reflect on these developments, consider the following: (1) The Gospel writers were very confident in the truth of what they had written (see *Luke 1:1–4*). What does Luke say about what he is writing? Why can we trust it? (2) One of those eyewitnesses that Luke speaks about was Peter, who himself had to confront doubters and skeptics (see *2 Pet. 1:16–21*). Though Peter is speaking here about issues wider than the single one about Jesus' identity, how might we use his approach to secure ourselves against the Enlightenment onslaught we are discussing here? (3) Paul also needed to address the issue of Jesus head-on. How did he argue the case? (See *1 Cor. 1:18–27, 15:3–7*.)**

## The Fascination Continues: Part 2

The so-called historical Jesus movement was founded on the belief that we still can find in the Gospels sufficient data to reconstruct the portrait of Jesus as a historical figure, notwithstanding the theological tampering by the early church (as alleged by Enlightenment thinking). The new approach to studying Jesus was seen by its advocates as scientific, and thus in keeping with the mood of the times.

The trend held sway until the twentieth century, when new studies helped undermine this whole movement, showing how this historical Jesus idea was utterly unscientific and subjective. Studies exposed the entire rationalistic enterprise as a miserable failure.

The history of Jesus studies are long, winding, and complicated; and they need not detain us further, except to mention the so-called Jesus Seminar, a contemporary group of radical scholars determined to succeed where other historical quests before them failed. Their goal is to “‘rescue Jesus from the spin doctors’ who wrote the Gospels.” —Roy Hoover, in Kenneth L. Woodward, “The Death of Jesus,” *Newsweek*, April 4, 1994, p. 39.

Few today take the Jesus Seminar people seriously. (After all, how seriously can you take people who argued that instead of being resurrected, Jesus, after His death, was eaten by dogs?) Today, the prevailing Christian position insists that Christianity stands on a firm, historical foundation. Notwithstanding two millennia of criticism and controversy, Jesus remains the undisputed Master of the centuries.

**In** one of his most penetrating rejoinders to the intellectual sophisticates of his day, Paul zeroed in on the essence of the Christian proclamation: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (*1 Cor. 1:18, NIV*). Why is the message of the Cross so important for us today, as well?

**Read also 1 Corinthians 1:18–27. What message is there for us in those verses? What are some of the things we believe that just cannot be explained by the “wisdom of the world” (vs. 20, NIV)? In what ways has “God made foolish the wisdom of the world” (vs. 20, NIV)?**

**Messiah, Son of God** (*John 17:3*)

Who Jesus was is not simply a theological proposition to be proved or disproved. No, we are dealing here with the faith of untold numbers over the centuries. If Jesus is not what they have believed Him to be, then they have all been clinging to falsehood and fables and are all lost. If Jesus was simply a man who lived two thousand years ago in Palestine, then the Christian church has been involved in the most reprehensible hoax in the history of the world.

**How** do the following texts get at the heart of the issue?

*Matt. 1:22, 23*

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*Matt. 11:2–6*

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*Matt. 22:41–45*

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*Mark 14:61–64*

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*John 20:26–28*

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The reaction of the disciples as they witnessed the miracle of the calming of the storm (*Matt. 8:23–27*) should be ours, as well: “‘What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!’” (*vs. 27, NIV*). The night of His arrest, the high priest put a direct question to Jesus and charged Him to answer under oath: “‘Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied” (*Matt. 26:63, 64, NIV*). And in Pilate’s judgment hall, the governor had his own query: “‘Are you the king of the Jews?’” Jesus’ response was the same: “‘Yes, it is as you say’” (*Matt. 27:11, NIV*).

By any measure, these were two extraordinary responses. If Jesus, only the son (as was believed) of a humble carpenter from Nazareth, could have the boldness to answer yes to Pilate’s question about kingship, He obviously was thinking of realities that transcend this world. And that is what we saw in His response in the high priest’s palace: “‘In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven’” (*Matt. 26:64, NIV*).

**Thus, the Gospels (and the rest of the New Testament) make it clear: In Jesus we have in human flesh the Son of the Living God, the One entitled to extend the exceptional invitation, “‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’” (*Matt. 11:28, NIV*).**

**Further Study:** On the issue of Jesus' identity, read Ellen G. White, "Is Not This the Carpenter's Son?" pp. 236–243, in *The Desire of Ages*.

"Who is this Jesus? they questioned. He who had claimed for Himself the glory of the Messiah was the son of a carpenter, and had worked at His trade with His father Joseph. They had seen Him toiling up and down the hills, they were acquainted with His brothers and sisters. . . . They had seen Him develop from childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. Although His life had been spotless, they would not believe that He was the Promised One."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 237. "They would not admit that He who had sprung from poverty and lowliness was other than a common man."—Page 239.

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic . . . or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."—C. S. Lewis, "The Shocking Alternative," p. 56, in *Mere Christianity* (New York: McMillan-Collier, 1960).

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What makes it easier for us, we who live two thousand years after Jesus, to accept Him as the Messiah, than it was for those who lived at the same time as Jesus to accept Him? What makes it more difficult?
- ❷ Skepticism about Jesus is likely to continue as long as time shall last. What, for you, is the single most convincing evidence of the validity of Jesus and His saving grace? How could you share this evidence with others in a way that could help convince them as well?
- ❸ We looked this week at how the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment had been used as a weapon against faith. What are some other types of "isms," or philosophies or ideologies, prevalent in your own culture that work against faith, as well? Most important, how can you meet these challenges?
- ❹ As a class, go back over 1 Corinthians 1:18–27. What message is Paul giving that is important for all of us to remember?



## Miriam's Stubborn Faith

Miriam (not her real name) is a teenager living in a polygamous family in Ibajiland, Nigeria. Because of her family's religion, she knew little about Christianity until some Global Mission pioneers came to conduct concentrated outreach. The pioneers hired Miriam's aunt to cook for them, and Miriam went along to help.

Miriam overheard the pioneers tell stories of Jesus that stirred her heart. She left the cooking pots and listened to the pioneers teach about Jesus. In time she gave her heart to Christ and asked to be baptized.

Word of Miriam's decision spread to her family, and fellow villagers tried to prevent her from being baptized. But they failed.

Her baptism triggered hostility, and Miriam was forced to leave her father's home. She found refuge with an Adventist teacher in her village, but militant religious leaders tried to kidnap her and force her to renounce her new faith, even if that meant killing her.

The pastor managed to help Miriam escape to safety, but angry religious leaders turned on the Adventist community, threatening to burn the church down.

In order to prevent a religious crisis in the region, the local king called a meeting of the two religious groups involved. The family's religious leaders insisted that the only peaceful solution was for the Adventists to produce Miriam. The king finally agreed and ordered the Adventists to return Miriam to her family.

Reluctantly the pastor sent word for Miriam to return home. She was taken to the king's palace, where she exhibited great boldness for a young girl. She told those present that she was not interested in returning to her parents' religion, but wanted to continue to follow Christ.

Some members of Miriam's family, seeing her strong conviction, were willing to allow her to follow Christianity, but the religious leaders demanded that she return to her father's faith and have no contact with Adventists. The pastor told the council that if Miriam wished to worship with the church members at any time, she would be welcome and the church would never send her away.

Miriam returned home with her father, who tried to force her to worship with them. But Miriam is determined to remain true to Christ and finds ways to share her faith with others. She must remain under her father's control until she finishes high school, but then she will worship as she wishes. Her brothers have seen Miriam's faith, and though they cannot openly say it, they too wish to leave their father's religion and follow Jesus.

Pray for Miriam, and give your mission offerings so that those who are searching for the truth may find it, no matter where they live.

# The Mystery of His Deity



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2; Matt. 16:13–17; John 1:1, 14, 18; 8:58; 17:5; 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 13:14.*

**Memory Text:** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (*John 1:1–3, NIV*).

Leaving the historical overview, we come to the Scriptures themselves. We want to see what they tell us about Jesus, whose life has commanded so much attention through the centuries. As we do so, we ought to keep in mind the crucial exchange between Jesus and His disciples at Caesarea Philippi. Upon hearing Peter's confession of Him as the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus reminded him that this insight did not spring from human investigation but was disclosed “by my Father in heaven” (*Matt. 16:17, NIV*). (See *Matt. 16:13–17, also Matt. 11:25–27*.) “Flesh and blood” (*Matt. 16:17, KJV*), our own unaided, human wisdom, is inadequate in the presence of the supreme mystery of the ages.

To believe in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God is to affirm, indirectly, that He did not have His origin in Mary's womb. It is to affirm His essential differentness from the rest of humanity, however much He may be like us in other ways. In short, it is to believe that He existed before His time on earth; that, quite simply, He preexisted. He was “the image of the invisible God,” by whom “all things were created” (*Col. 1:15, 16, NIV*). “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (*vs. 17, NIV*).

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 12.*

## His Preexistence—What It Means to Us

**Why** should we be concerned about Christ’s preexistence? What has it to do with salvation? What hint(s) toward an answer do you find in Hebrews 1:1–4 and Colossians 1:15–20?

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For all of us, our existence began when we were born (or, as some argue, it began when we were conceived). Christ was different. He did not come into existence in Mary’s womb. He was before that, eternally so. That is what we mean by His preexistence. He was there before all time.

**How** do the following texts give us hints about Christ’s preexistence?

*Isa. 9:6*

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*Mic. 5:2 (compare Matt. 2:1–6)*

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The word *mosa’ah* (KJV: “goings forth”; RSV: “origin”) in Micah 5:2 is not easy to translate. But the other part of the verse clearly refers not only to the preexistence of the coming Ruler but also to His eternal preexistence “from everlasting.” (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1025.)

Isaiah 9:6 teaches the eternal preexistence of this special Person who was to come into the world. It is an extraordinary claim that this One would be called, among other titles, “Mighty God, Everlasting Father.” It is all the more significant when we remember that the prophecy was addressed to an audience decidedly monotheistic; and the fact that Isaiah could refer to this Son as “Mighty God, Everlasting Father” was nothing short of astonishing, nothing short of a divine revelation breaking through the prophet’s own accustomed way of thinking. *The Son is the Father, “the Everlasting Father”?* Talk about having to live by faith!

**What other aspects of our beliefs, contrary to accepted norms, customs, and ways of thinking, do we have to take on raw, naked faith and nothing else? Is there something wrong with having to do that?**

## The Witness of the New Testament

Other evidence exists, now in the New Testament, that reveals the preexistence of Jesus. Perhaps some of the most interesting ones come from the mouth of Jesus Himself, as He says things that imply that He, Himself, was aware of His own preexistence.

We find both direct and indirect indications that Jesus was, indeed, conscious of His own history. As a possible example of an indirect allusion to His preexistence, He said in Luke 19:10 that “ ‘the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost’ ” (*NIV*). For example, if someone says, “I came to London to work at the House of Commons,” the person implies that she was somewhere else before. The person who has been living in London all along does not use that expression. An explicit statement from Jesus came in the words of His great Passion Week prayer when He asked His Father to glorify Him “ ‘with the glory I had with you before the world began’ ” (*John 17:5, NIV*).

**How** do the following passages reveal not only the preexistence of Christ but His own awareness of that preexistence?

*John 3:13*

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*John 8:23*

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*John 8:58, 59*

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*John 17:8, 24*

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“ ‘Before Abraham was, I am’ ” (*John 8:58*). The “I AM” expression in this text and elsewhere suggests the idea of *everlastingness*, of *eternal preexistence*. Jesus’ audience, understanding this point very well, took up stones to kill Him for what they saw as outrageous blasphemy (*vs. 59*).

“In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 29, 1900.

**How does Ellen G. White’s quote above, along with the texts we have just looked at, help us to better understand the incredible sacrifice made in our behalf at the Cross?**

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## Apparent Contradictions

Notwithstanding the clearest statements about Jesus' deity and equality with God the Father, we still encounter passages that call for explanation. One example occurs in what is undoubtedly the most beloved and well-known text in all the Bible, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his *only begotten* son." The problem is, How can the text say Jesus was "begotten" if He was eternal? Did someone *beget* Him, just like the rest of us?

The expression "only begotten" is one word in the Greek language: *monogenes*, occurring nine times in the New Testament, with five of those references applying to Jesus and all five in the writings of John (*John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9*). It is significant that all five references occur in the writings of the very author who from the start of his Gospel seeks to establish the deity of Jesus Christ. Indeed, he commences precisely on that point: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*John 1:1*). It would have been incredible that this Jewish writer would have attributed the title of Deity to someone he considered a created being.

**In each of the following passages, the word *monogenes* refers to someone other than Jesus. If you are unfamiliar with the Greek, guess from the translation where the word falls. What do you think it means?**

*Luke 7:11–15*

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*Luke 8:41, 42*

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*Luke 9:38*

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The boy from Nain who had died is described as an "only son" ("the only son of his mother"). No emphasis here on the idea of *begetting*. Rather, the focus is on *singleness, onliness, uniqueness*. The same is true in regard to Jairus's daughter—she was his "only . . . daughter," his *monogenes*, the only one of a kind, his only child; in this sense she was unique. That is also the point of Luke 9:38.

**The weight of scholarly opinion favors the view that *monogenes*, linguistically, does not place emphasis on begetting or begotten, but rather on the oneness of a kind, on the idea of uniqueness. How does this idea, too, help us better understand the great sacrifice made for us at the Cross?**

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## The Deity of Christ

The writers of the New Testament make it clear that Jesus deserves the divine title of God. This fact takes on added significance when one remembers that with the exception of Luke, all those writers were Jews, strongly monotheistic, and not predisposed to using the Divine titles carelessly. One must understand, therefore, that their testimony to Jesus' deity sprang from the deepest, Holy Spirit-inspired conviction.

**How** do the following passages make the case for Jesus' deity?

*Matt. 3:3*

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*John 1:1*

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*John 1:18*

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*John 20:28*

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Matthew 3:3 harks back to Isaiah 40:3, where Isaiah uses the word *Yahweh*, the most sacred name for God in the Old Testament. The construction of the John 1:1 passage in the original language leaves no doubt about what John was saying. Some 65 years after His death, Jesus is being expressly called God by one who had been in close association with Him. In regard to John 1:18, the Greek expression used in the passage calls Jesus, in effect, "the unique God."

Then how about John 20:28? Was this simply an exclamation, an expression of surprise on Thomas's part, the same way people today would use the name of God to express astonishment or shock? To come to that conclusion would be to read a modern practice back into the New Testament. In the first place, the Jews, careful as they were to stay clear of blasphemy, did not have the expression in their vocabulary. Furthermore, the very construction of the passage militates against such an interpretation. The passage says, "Thomas said to him" (*NIV*). Thomas, in other words, was addressing Jesus; it was an expression of faith, not an exclamation of surprise. And the fact that Jesus did not rebuke him shows that He was satisfied with Thomas's confession.

**Jesus as God is the same Jesus who offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. How much more should the Cross mean to us, knowing that it was God—*God!*—hanging there for our sins.**

## And There's More

The New Testament is full of evidence for Jesus' deity, but space prohibits more detailed elaboration here. We might have dealt with, for example, such attributes as eternity and creatorship applied to Jesus; *His claim to forgive sins; His claim to be the final Judge of the last day.* In addition, we find *the name of Jesus associated with that of the Father on a footing of equality*, as in the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19). Also, in John 14:9, Jesus uses *words that would constitute obvious blasphemy on the lips of any other human being:* "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (NIV).

**Take** a look at the following passages. What do they teach about Christ's divinity?

1 Cor. 1:3

2 Cor. 13:14

Rev. 20:6

Rev. 22:3

The above passages put Christ on an equal footing with the One whom we have come to call "God the Father." And this all measures up with Jesus' own declarations when He walked the dusty streets of Palestine. In John 10:30, for example, He declared, "I and the Father are one" (NIV). The neuter form of the Greek used here for "one" implies a union as close as our minds can conceive. Jesus and the Father are of *one substance, one nature*, yet not one and the same Person (in which case He would have used the masculine gender). If you have trouble plumbing the depths of all this, you have lots of company. The deeper you probe the subject, the more keenly you understand the depths of your ignorance.

But imagine a situation in which the Being we have come to know as God the Father came to die for us, and the One we have come to know as Jesus stayed back in heaven (we are speaking in human terms to make a point). Nothing would have changed, except that we would have been calling Each by the name we now use for the Other. That is what equality in the Deity means.

**Review the life of Jesus, keeping in mind the points we have touched on this week. What does all this tell us about the character of God? Why should we, knowing what we know about God, be so full of hope and joy and trust, even in difficult circumstances?**

**Further Study:** See Ellen G. White, “God With Us,” pp. 19–26, in *The Desire of Ages*.

It is instructive to see how deftly Matthew and Luke deal with the genealogy of Jesus (*Matt 1:16, 18; Luke 3:23; compare 1:26–35*). These Bible writers could not have been more careful on this point. What we find is a complete absence of any confusion on this fundamental point, with John’s Gospel providing perhaps the strongest affirmation of Jesus’ deity anywhere in Scripture (*John 1:1–3, 14*). It shows how critical is the concept of the virgin birth for the whole scheme of salvation. The virgin birth, on which rests the affirmation of Christ’s preexistence and deity, stands rock solid in the Gospels.

“Another dangerous error is the doctrine that denies the deity of Christ, claiming that He had no existence before His advent to this world. This theory is received with favor by a large class who profess to believe the Bible; yet it directly contradicts the plainest statements of our Saviour concerning His relationship with the Father, His divine character, and His pre-existence. It cannot be entertained without the most unwarranted wresting of the Scriptures. It not only lowers man’s conceptions of the work of redemption, but undermines faith in the Bible as a revelation from God. While this renders it the more dangerous, it makes it also harder to meet. If men reject the testimony of the inspired Scriptures concerning the deity of Christ, it is in vain to argue the point with them; for no argument, however conclusive, could convince them. . . . None who hold this error can have a true conception of the character or the mission of Christ, or of the great plan of God for man’s redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 524.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Look at Ellen G. White’s quote above. Why is it so important that we adhere to the doctrine of Christ’s deity and equality with the Father? What would the plan of salvation lose were we to abandon this teaching?
- ❷ How important is the incident of Matthew 9:1–8? How deliberate was Jesus about bringing the issue of His deity to a head? What lessons was He trying to teach? What connection was He making between our physical and our spiritual malady?
- ❸ Dwell on the implications of the deity of Christ, in light of the Cross. Be prepared to bring your thoughts on this topic to class on Sabbath.

## Walking in Faith

José did not attend church, but he loved reading the Bible on his own. He just wished that his wife would study with him. He found new truths that excited him—and some things that baffled him.

One day José met an Adventist pastor who invited him to visit the Adventist church. José went, and there he found answers to many questions. He learned about the Sabbath and decided to ask his boss for Sabbaths off. He prayed for courage and went to see him. To his delight, José's boss agreed to give him Sabbaths off.

Then one day as José sat on the platform at church, he saw his boss enter the sanctuary and stand in the back. When the service ended, José went to greet him. His boss said, "A customer is waiting to see you at the office. You must come to the office—now."

"But today is my Sabbath," José said. "I don't go to the office today." With that his boss turned angrily and walked away. Realizing that perhaps he had not explained the Sabbath clearly, José wrote a letter explaining why he would not work on Saturdays. On Monday he gave the letter to his boss, even though he might lose his job.

His wife learned of the letter and worried that his religion would leave the family destitute. But José assured her that God would provide. José's company gave him Sabbaths off. Because of his steadfast faith, José's wife began attending church.

The couple started a small group in their home, which quickly grew. They needed a larger place to worship. One day José saw some property that would make an ideal location for a church. The little group prayed that God would help them buy the land, and God answered their prayer. They began saving to build a church.

When a hurricane ravaged their area, the group wondered what would happen to their dream for a church. Then they learned that Maranatha International was coming to rebuild churches and schools in Honduras. The little group applied for help, and Maranatha built their church.

The new church holds 150 people, and the believers are working to fill it. José goes door-to-door introducing people to Christ and holds four evangelistic series a year. The congregation now has more than 60 members, most of whom are new believers.

The church members are forming more small groups to help train new believers to lead others to Christ. Following Christ's methods, this group has made a big impact on their community in Honduras. Our mission offerings support lay evangelism in many forms. Thank you for your part in telling the world about God's love.

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*JOSÉ JOYA is a graphic designer living in Choluteca, Honduras.*

# The Reality of His Humanity



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:5; 3:16; Heb. 4:15, 16; 1 John 4:1–3.*

**Memory Text:** “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (*John 1:14, NIV*).

In the New Testament, without any rationalistic explanations whatsoever, Jesus Christ is presented as both human and Divine. After beginning his Gospel with the Word who is God (*John 1:1*), John makes the extraordinary declaration that this same Word, this same God, “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (*vs. 14, NIV*). And perhaps anticipating future concerns about moral contamination, the New Testament maintains the sinless life of Jesus with unequivocal consistency (*Heb. 7:26, 1 Pet. 2:22*). Moreover, the writers of the New Testament matter-of-factly regard Jesus as a proper object of worship and veneration (*Acts 7:59, Rom. 9:5, Heb. 1:6*). These earliest Christians were not detained by the philosophical problems inherent in the concept of the God-man or by the difficulties it would pose for later thinkers. “The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. . . . When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, ‘Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground’ (*Exod. 3:5*). We should come to this study with the humility of a learner.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 19.*



## In the Presence of Mystery (*1 Tim. 3:16*)

Last week's lesson spoke about the mystery of Christ's deity. But as we contemplate His humanity, we stand also in the presence of a profound mystery. As Paul expressed it: "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He [Jesus] appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (*1 Tim. 3:16, NIV*).

One scholar makes the point that the claim that the founder of Christianity was Divine was not a big shock in the Roman world; after all, their emperors routinely claimed divinity. But the claim that "the Christian God was concerned about humanity; concerned enough to suffer in its behalf. This was unheard of."—Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), p. 219. But however strange to the Greco-Roman world, that, precisely, was the testimony of the New Testament.

**What** do the following passages teach about this amazing condescension?

*Matt. 1:18–24*

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*Luke 1:26–35*

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*John 1:1, 14*

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*Gal. 4:4*

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*Phil. 2:5–11*

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It is fascinating to watch the unstudied precision with which the New Testament writers approach the issue of Christ's humanity. Matter-of-fact and straightforward, they simply tell the story, with no knowledge (perhaps) of the firestorm that would follow in succeeding centuries. But it is precisely the absence of any posturing that helps give credibility to the documents that we have. It is not as if the earliest disciples faced no controversy in regard to the nature and identity of Jesus; they did, as we see in the New Testament itself. But their arguments in regard to Jesus' person clearly were not designed to counter the position of rationalistic or *scientific* opponents, which gives an unspoiled freshness to their witness. It was as though they argued their case out of surprise that anyone would dare to doubt the uncommon mystery that had affected them so dramatically, both corporately and personally.

## Then There Was Conflict

As Christianity spread through the Greco-Roman world and moved into the second generation, people began to reflect on its basic message about Jesus' person, and to raise questions: How could Divinity and humanity cohabit the same body? How could Deity become mortal? What is Jesus' relationship to the Father? And so forth . . .

Beginning in the first century, two conflicting emphases emerged. One would stress Christ's humanity at the expense of His divinity; the other would do just the opposite. Among those denying Christ's deity were the Ebionites, early Jewish Christians who taught that Jesus became the Son of God only at His baptism, at which time He became united with the eternal Christ, a nondivine being who could not save humanity but came, instead, to call humanity to obedience. The Arians later would take up the struggle against Christ's divinity, beginning around the late third century, a position strongly condemned by the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325.

The heavyweights on the other side of the spectrum were the Gnostics, who taught that *spirit* was good and *matter* evil, particularly the matter that forms our body. Therefore, the human body could not serve as a vehicle for the revelation of the Supreme Being.

**Study 1** John 4:1–3. In what way does John's concern relate to the Gnostic emphasis just described?

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The controversy over who Jesus was raged for five solid centuries, from the second century all the way down to the sixth. At first it was over His deity. Was He God? And if so, how was He related to God the Father? The questions then shifted to His humanity, and to how Divinity and humanity were combined in a single person. There were statements and counterstatements, pronouncements and counterpronouncements, accusations and condemnations and excommunications, with one "ism" after another claiming the day. Incredibly, amid all the turmoil and controversy, biblical orthodoxy in respect to Jesus' essential nature and person ultimately prevailed. (See the quotation from the Creed of Chalcedon in Friday's lesson.)

**What are some of the questions in the church today about the human nature of Christ? Why must we be careful not to let these questions divide us, as they often did the early church?**

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## He Took Our Nature (Gal. 4:4)

Many of His contemporaries considered Jesus an unusual person, yet they each knew Him to be a human being, a man. When the Samaritan woman rushed to her village to spread the word about the unusual Jew she just had met at the well, her announcement was straightforward: “ ‘Come, see a man’ ” (John 4:29, NIV). Hers was the universal testimony of Jesus’ contemporaries. Even after He had calmed the storm, the exclamation of those closest to Him was, “ ‘What kind of man is this?’ ” (Matt. 8:27, NIV).

**How** do the following texts help support the fact that Jesus was a genuine human being of flesh and blood?

Matt. 8:24

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Matt. 21:18

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John 4:5, 6

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John 4:7, 19:28

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John 11:33–35

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While on earth, Jesus voluntarily surrendered the *independent* exercise of the Divine attributes. He *surrendered*; He did not relinquish. The attributes remained in Him. He could have used them at any time for His own advantage, but He did not. The temptation to call on these attributes to extricate Himself from difficulty (in ways not open to us) was a major ingredient of His daily trials.

It is helpful to keep in mind that the Scriptures are not definitive on every point that stirs our interest. They make no overt attempt, for example, to spell out precisely how the human and Divine components of Jesus’ nature are related. But they make it clear that Christ was *one unified person*. They do not discuss the technicalities of this union, limiting themselves, rather, to the clear confession that such a union did occur, that the Son made of a woman was, indeed, the Son of God (Gal. 4:4). “Christ did not make-believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 74.

**Why is Christ’s humanity so important to us? What does it mean to us to know that Jesus became a human being? How does it encourage you to know that Jesus shared our human limitations?**

## To Feel Our Pain *(Heb. 4:15, 16)*

Why did God need to come into the world in human flesh? The question is important. But we should wean ourselves away from purely rational answers to it. It is not as if we need to come up with an answer that makes sense to us. There is no independent research we can do in philosophy, science, sociology, or whatever, that would lead us to an answer. Nor should we concoct our own answer. The safest way is to listen carefully to what the Bible itself reveals on this point. And in the book of Hebrews, we find some of the clearest, most intentional statements on the issue. Nor is it without significance that Hebrews also happens to be the book focusing most directly on Jesus' present high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

**Each** of the following passages highlights one particular aspect of Jesus' coming in human flesh, then proceeds to answer the implied question: **Why did He do that? And in each case a reason for that particular aspect of His humiliation is given. What are those reasons?**

*Heb. 2:9*

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*Heb. 2:14, 15*

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*Heb. 2:16, 17*

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*Heb. 2:18*

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*Heb. 4:14–16*

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*Heb. 5:8, 9*

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Notice that in each case, the focus is on Jesus; and in each case, the benefit is for us. These inspired reasons for Jesus' humanity and suffering should be taken with utter seriousness. They should bring us immense joy to know that Jesus meets us in our need; His arms are open wide for us; He knows our plight because He has been here; *He has felt our pain*. Can we imagine a more merciful Savior, a more understanding and compassionate High Priest? Immense joy and profound gratitude wells up in the souls of those who know that He suffered all for us. Thus encouraged, we "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (*Heb. 4:16, NIV*), giving ourselves to Him in complete abandon.

**What trials are you encountering at the moment? How does it help you to know that Jesus feels and understands your pain?**

## An Eternal Solidarity *(1 Tim. 2:5)*

When we imagine the huge difference between God and ourselves, it is astounding to think that God would reach out to us by condescending to take on human flesh. But after He was done, most of us would have been content for Him to abandon His affinity with us and return fully to what He was before. However—and this absolutely astounds us—we learn that Jesus will forever remain in solidarity with us by retaining our nature!

**Consider** the implications of the following passages in regard to Jesus’ eternal solidarity with us:

*Luke 24:36–43*

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*Acts 1:10, 11*

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*Acts 17:31*

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*1 Tim. 2:5*

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“By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan’s purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us. ‘God so loved the world . . .’ He gave Him not only to bear our sins, and to die as our sacrifice; He gave Him to the fallen race. To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature. . . . God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven. It is the ‘Son of man’ who shares the throne of the universe.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25. “Christ ascended to heaven, bearing a sanctified, holy humanity. He took this humanity with Him into the heavenly courts, and through the eternal ages He will bear it, as the One who has redeemed every human being in the city of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1054.

**A friend of yours, hearing about Jesus’ eternal solidarity with us, says, “That is going too far. It is too much!” What would you say to that person? And how do you feel about the fact He will be like us for eternity? However incredible a concept, what does it tell us about God’s love for humanity?**

**Further Study:** In the centuries-old controversy over the person of Jesus, the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) marked a significant milestone. Essentially, it agreed and proclaimed that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man: “. . . we all with one voice teach that . . . our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same God, the Same perfect in Godhead, the Same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, . . . [one] with the Father as to his Godhead, and . . . [one] with us as to his manhood; in all things like unto us, sin only excepted.”—Cited in Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 390. For an assessment of the implications of the Chalcedon statement from an Adventist perspective, see Roy Adams, *The Nature of Christ* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 57–72.

“In contemplating the incarnation of Christ in humanity, we stand baffled before an unfathomable mystery. . . . The more we reflect upon it, the more amazing does it appear. How wide is the contrast between the divinity of Christ and the helpless infant in Bethlehem’s manger! How can we span the distance between the mighty God and a helpless child? And yet the Creator of worlds, He in whom was the fullness of the Godhead bodily, was manifest in the helpless babe in the manger. Far higher than any of the angels, equal with the Father in dignity and glory, and yet wearing the garb of humanity! Divinity and humanity were mysteriously combined, and man and God became one. It is in this union that we find the hope of our fallen race.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 30, 1896.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- ❶ What for you are the big issues surrounding Christ’s humanity? Why are they important for you? At the same time, why must we be careful not to be too harsh or dogmatic about the finer points of Christ’s humanity?
- ❷ Ellen G. White says that Christ’s humanity is everything to us (see *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 244). What did she mean? In what practical ways does the idea of Christ’s humanity affect you in your Christian walk?
- ❸ How might we use what we have studied in this week’s lesson in our personal witness? How does the reality of Christ’s humanity touch people where they live today?

# The Woman Who Didn't Like God

by HEIDEMARIE KLINGEBERG

On a snowy March day in Germany, a woman who had not liked God was baptized into the Adventist Church.

"I thought Christians were weak people who could not manage their lives by themselves," Ute testified. "Then I met my neighbor Frank. He manages his life and a demanding job quite well. One day he invited my children to join Pathfinders at his church. 'They will learn a lot of useful things, and it will be good for them,'" Frank said.

"*Why not?* I thought. My youngest daughter joined Pathfinders and really enjoyed it.

"Frank invited me to attend a Pathfinders reception in the church. I wasn't so sure I wanted to meet these strange people, but I decided to go in spite of my concerns.

"I entered the church with mixed feelings and looked around the sanctuary. It was so simple, not as I had expected. And the pastor seemed normal and friendly.

"I liked the people I met that day. They were not weird at all. I started attending church and had to admit that I really enjoyed it. The warmth and love the people showed me made me feel accepted and loved. Each week I took part with greater enthusiasm and commitment in the worship at the Adventist Church. I was growing spiritually.

"I began reading the Bible for myself, starting with the Old Testament. But that was too hard. I went on the Internet and searched for something in German to help me understand the Bible better. There I discovered the Voice of Hope Bible correspondence course. I enrolled, and I began completing the Bible study guides with growing enthusiasm. Studying the Bible became almost an addiction! My coach encouraged me when I got stuck and answered my frequent questions.

"I have learned so much from the Bible studies, and my life has changed a great deal. I have discovered that the Bible gives me what I call operating instructions for my daily life, and from studying God's 'manual,' I get great joy. I have discovered that I have a loving heavenly Father who will help me through life's bumps.

"I sealed my commitment to God through baptism and started a new life. My sorrows are not all gone, but Jesus goes with me into battle and has promised never to leave me. I have seen Him work out several problems already.

"The future may not be easy, but I am confident in spite of problems, for Jesus and my new brothers and sisters in Christ are beside me."

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# The Wisdom of His Teachings



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matthew 5–7, 20:25–28, John 4:22–24, 8:1–11.*

**Memory Text:** “The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (*Mark 1:22, NIV*).

Jesus could have flashed bright beams of light on the darkest mysteries of science, but He would not spare a moment from teaching the knowledge of the science of salvation. His time, His knowledge, His faculties, His life itself, were appreciated only as the means of working out the salvation of the souls of men.—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 245.

There is a danger that in talking about the wisdom of His teachings (as in the title of this week's lesson), we may not distinguish enough between Jesus and other (so-called) wise teachers across the centuries. Jesus' teachings were not simply wise. They contained, in addition, a qualitative element that essentially distinguished them from everything that preceded or has since followed. There was about them a certain finality, a conclusiveness not found elsewhere. In other words, *this was God talking in human flesh*. However much the people did not know about the true identity of Christ, they still could tell there was something unique about Him and what He said. “The crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority” (*Matt. 7:28, 29, NIV*).

This week we will look at just what some of those teachings were.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 26.*

## The Greatest Sermon *(Matthew 5–7)*

Year after year hundreds of thousands of sermons make their way into the realm of oblivion. Some are remembered for a while, then forgotten. What would it take to have a particular sermon not only remembered and quoted for two thousand years but even identified by the place of its delivery? Such is the Sermon on the Mount.

During the First World War, the Society of Friends printed *The Sermon on the Mount* as a separate pamphlet, without commentary, for distribution among the allied forces. But both the British and French governments forbade its distribution among their troops. After all, a sermon telling people to love their enemies was not exactly what you wanted men on the front lines in a war to be reading!

**Read** through the Beatitudes (*Matt. 5:3–12*). Which aspects do you find most meaningful for the experiences you are going through right now?

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In the Beatitudes some elements merely describe the condition in which we may find ourselves. The person who “mourns,” for instance, does not seek that state. But meekness (or better, humility) we should seek; as the prophet says, “Seek righteousness, seek humility [meekness]” (*Zeph. 2:3, NIV*). Hungering and thirsting after righteousness is not a state natural to us humans, nor can we manufacture it. But we are admonished to seek after it.

**Give** a brief summary of the following teachings that appear (among others) in the rest of the sermon:

1. **Our influence in society** (*Matt. 5:13–16*)
2. **The law of God** (*Matt. 5:17–20*)
3. **Heart religion** (*Matt. 5:21–30*)
4. **Divorce** (*Matt. 5:31, 32*)
5. **Retaliation** (*Matt. 5:38–42*)
6. **Love for enemies** (*Matt. 5:43–48*)
7. **Prayer** (*Matt. 6:5–15*)

As you reflect on the Beatitudes and the rest of the sermon, which aspects do you find most pointed? Which most keenly cuts across your accustomed ways, your own cultural norms? What changes do you need to make in order to be more in harmony with these words from God?

## What He Taught About God

Into a world dark with misunderstanding about the person and character of God, Jesus came to set things straight, by His life and by His word. Coming from the very essence of God, He brought a revelation of God that could not be improved upon. In the past, the prophets had spoken about God; but now, “in these last days,” God was speaking “by his Son . . . through whom he made the universe” (*Heb. 1:1, 2, NIV*). Through Jesus, in other words, we have the ultimate disclosure of the Supreme Being.

**What** is Jesus saying about God in following passages?

*Matt. 5:8, 9*

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*Matt. 18:5, 6, 10; 19:13, 14*

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*John 4:22–24*

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*John 10:27–30*

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A critical test of the decency of any society, ancient or modern, is the value it places upon the most vulnerable of its members, and there is none more vulnerable than children. Jesus’ regard for these tender ones must have come as a breath of fresh air to those poor mothers two thousand years ago when He vigorously defended their children’s right of access to Him, when He made time in His hectic calendar for these tiny tots, time to touch them and to bless them.

God is like that, Jesus’ action said. He cares for the children and, by extension, for all who are vulnerable and exploited. He is the God of the underdog. As He sat there with these little ones looking into His face, Jesus must have thought of what we call “the Slaughter of the Innocents” by Herod on account of Him (*Matt. 2:16–18*), and the bloody edict of an ancient pharaoh against all Jewish male infants (*Exod. 1:15, 16*). Jesus came to model a God who was the complete antithesis of these murderous psychopaths.

**From what you have read above, what picture of God does Jesus present? How have you experienced these aspects of God’s character yourself? Even more important, how well do you reflect those aspects of His character in your own life?**

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## What He Taught About Forgiveness

(Matt. 6:12–14)

Of all the words that we might associate with Jesus, *forgiveness* has to be right there among the top. Jesus and forgiveness go together. Amid the excruciating agony of the cross, and as soldiers and people derided and abused Him, the heartrending words stumbled out through quivering lips: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34, NIV). And in the Sermon on the Mount He went so far as to say that if we do not forgive those who offend us, then we should not expect God to forgive our offenses against Him (Matt. 6:12, 14, 15).

**What** is Jesus teaching about forgiveness in each of the following passages? Mark 2:5–12; Luke 7:36–50; 17:3, 4; John 8:1–11.

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**The** wonderful statements about forgiveness notwithstanding, what cautionary, balancing factors do we find in the following passages? (Matt. 12:31, 32; 18:6; Mark 14:21).

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In Mark 14:21, Jesus uttered a woe upon the “man who betrays the Son of Man.” But suppose that man were to confess and repent? In this connection, contrast the actions of Judas and Peter following their separate betrayals of Jesus. After witnessing Jesus’ condemnation by those who had arrested Him, Judas, “seized with remorse,” returned the betrayal money to the authorities, and his words seemed most appropriate: “I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood” (Matt. 27:3, 4, NIV). In contrast to Judas’s public display of regret, Peter’s tears of penitence were shed in silence; nor did he return to Caiaphas’s judgment hall to make amends for his shameful betrayal. Yet, the one was condemned, the other forgiven. What was the crucial difference?

**How are we to understand forgiveness in a practical sense? For instance, a woman can forgive a husband who beats her, but does forgiveness mean leaving oneself vulnerable to more abuse? How can we forgive while at the same time be wise and prudent enough to protect ourselves and others from those who have violated our trust?**

## What He Taught About Humility

(Matt. 20:25–28)

In a 1995 survey, some athletes were asked the following question: If there was a drug you could take that would guarantee you'd receive a gold medal at the Olympics but that would kill you in five years, would you take it? More than 50 percent said Yes. It is a commentary on the lure of fame and power on contemporary society. To be “in front of the camera,” to hold millions drooling in the palm of our hand, that is the rage of the twenty-first century.

And that same general spirit can invade the church, if we do not remain constantly on guard. The lust for power over others (the drive to be in control, the hunger for the first place) has not diminished with the passing of the years.

**Study** the following passages in the context of this insatiable struggle for the top:

*Matt. 18:1–6*

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*Matt. 20:25–28*

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*Matt. 23:1, 5–12*

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*1 Pet. 5:1–4*

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The harsh events of history sometimes have sent proud dictators scrambling penniless among refugees or cowering in solitary confinement, taking orders from third-class prison wardens. There even have been times when a monarch temporarily gives up the throne to make common lot with the marginalized members of society. But all these cases put together, voluntary or coerced, pale in comparison with the magnitude of the condescension we see in Christ. He was “in very nature God,” Paul says; that is the *God of the universe* we are talking about here! “But [He] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” Descending further yet, “he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (*Phil. 2:5–8, NIV*).

**In light of the Cross, in light of the amazing condescension of the Son of God, why should all forms of self-exaltation be brought to shame? How can we protect ourselves from this subtle yet very dangerous form of self-deception?**

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## What He Taught About Grace—and Faith

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works” (*Eph. 2:8, 9, NIV*). The words are from the apostle Paul as he reflected on the Christian message of salvation, which he expressed differently than Jesus did. In fact, one might be tempted to ask whether Jesus believed in righteousness by faith. But to ask that question is to grossly misunderstand both Paul and Jesus. Jesus’ approach to teaching about grace seemed at times to go in a different direction; one reason, incidentally, that we should not be too legalistic with one another over the exact formulas we each use to describe God’s marvelous act of grace in Jesus, and our response to it.

Jesus came as the epitome of grace. He was grace personified. To encounter Him was to encounter grace. “We have seen his glory,” John wrote, “the glory of the One and Only, . . . full of grace and truth” (*John 1:14, NIV*).

**In** the following passages, what is Jesus teaching about grace and faith?

*Matt. 14:28–31*

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*Matt. 20:1–15*

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*Luke 7:36–48*

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*Luke 15:11–31*

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*John 8:1–11*

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From these passages, we learn something of the many ways Jesus taught about grace, through His parables and through the object lessons of His own life. How could Peter ever forget his utter helplessness in the face of the deadly elements that surrounded him that night on the lake? His only recourse was to cry out to a Power beyond himself. And instantly the response was there! No delay. No need for penance. No complicated formula or requirement. Just three words, coming naturally from his extreme desperation: “Lord, save me!” (*Matt. 14:30, NIV*). And immediately the hand of Jesus was on him. That is grace.

**Of the various accounts listed above, which one speaks to you most powerfully of God’s grace? Having received such grace yourself, how can you be more willing to give it to others just as undeserving as yourself?**

**Further Study:** According to historian Huston Smith, Jesus' teachings "may be the most repeated in history. *'Love your neighbor as yourself. What you would like people to do to you, do to them. Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'* Most of the time, though, he told stories: of buried treasure, of sowers who went out to sow, of pearl merchants, of a good Samaritan. People who heard these stories were moved to exclaim, *'This man speaks with authority. Never spoke man thus!'* . . . The most impressive thing about the teachings of Jesus is not that he taught them but that he appears to have lived them. From the accounts that we have, his entire life was one of humility, self-giving, and love that sought not its own. The supreme evidence of his humility is that it is impossible to discover precisely what Jesus thought of himself. He wasn't concerned with that. He was concerned with what people thought of God. . . . We have seen that he ignored the barriers that mores erected between people. He loved children. He hated injustice, and perhaps hated hypocrisy even more because it hid people from themselves."—*The Illustrated World's Religions*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1986) pp. 212, 213.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Many issues that have concerned us in recent times Jesus never touched (drug abuse, health reform, homosexuality, slavery, cloning, abortion, etc.). What conclusions should we draw from these omissions? What conclusions should we *not* draw?
- ❷ What role might Jesus' teaching on forgiveness play in issues of international conflict today? How can Christians bring that teaching to bear upon the resolution of issues in their homes, churches, and communities? When is forgiveness *not* the answer to the particular problems faced by nations and individuals, or is it always the answer?
- ❸ Notwithstanding its universal appeal, the Sermon on the Mount often is ignored when we confront the real problems of life. Why do you think this is so? And how is it in your own life? In what ways could you consciously try to apply these principles in your own walk with the Lord?



# The Sidetracked Shuttle

by HOMER TRECARTIN

Pastor Dave Weigley boarded the airport shuttle and sat down, eager to relax a little before his meetings. He thought of the evangelistic meetings he had held in this Florida city a year earlier and wondered how the new members were doing. And what about the people who had come to the meetings but did not make a decision to follow Jesus?

His thoughts were interrupted by a woman's voice. "Please, just drop me off on your way to the hotel." Grudgingly the driver agreed to take the woman to her home.

The shuttle bus wound through traffic and stopped in front of a familiar-looking block of apartments. Pastor Weigley jumped up to help the woman with her bag. "Do you live here?" he asked.

"Yes," the woman said. Excited, Pastor Weigley asked if a certain woman still lived there. The woman eyed him and slowly answered, "Yes, she still lives there."

The shuttle door closed, and Pastor Weigley sat down. *This has to be more than coincidence*, he thought. *What does God want me to do?*

The woman he asked about had attended the meetings he had held, but in spite of many visits and prayers, she had not given her heart to Christ. Now God had led him back to her apartment complex. Weigley promised God that he would visit the woman before leaving town.

A few days later Weigley returned to the apartment where the woman lived. As he climbed the stairs he thought, *How do I greet someone whose name I don't remember?* He knocked on the door, but heard nothing from inside. As he turned to leave, the door opened and the woman exclaimed, "Well, Pastor Weigley. Please come in."

He entered and found the woman had company—a friend and another pastor who Weigley recognized. The women were as surprised as he was. Pastor Weigley told the others about his experience on the shuttle bus. The other pastor explained that he had come to apologize for an incident that had happened years earlier.

The two pastors prayed and invited the women to give their hearts to Jesus. With tears in her eyes, the woman who had attended the meetings knelt and surrendered to Christ. This woman has since been baptized, in part because two pastors had followed the Holy Spirit's leading and found a wanderer ready to come home.

Our mission offerings support outreach—both organized evangelism and personal witness. Thank you for sharing God's love through your offerings.

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# The Wonder of His Works



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 4:23–25; 8:25–27; 11:2–6; 12:22, 23; Acts 3:19–21.*

**Memory Text:** “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (*Matthew 9:36, NIV*).

Even the most cursory reading of the life of Jesus as presented in the Gospels reveals an interesting fact: With the exception of the amazing events surrounding His birth, very little of Jesus' childhood and early years are recounted. This gap has led to all sorts of speculation through the centuries about what Christ had done during all those lost years. Nothing, though, comes close to what Ellen G. White wrote in *The Desire of Ages* (“As a Child”).

Instead, the Bible focuses on His adult life, specifically the three and a half years of His ministry. What a three and a half years they were!

The world has experienced nothing like it. His works, always for others, and completely without capriciousness, are presented as evidence of a new day dawning, the birth of the kingdom of God. The moment the Sermon on the Mount ended, the scene changed abruptly, with Jesus immediately plunging Himself into the needs of the people (*see Matthew 8, 9*). For Jesus it was not just words. He had the works to more than back up the words.

The kingdom of God had arrived, and Jesus was there to inaugurate it.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 3.*

## What Kind of Man Is This? (Matt. 8:25–27)

**Read** Matthew 8:1–4. What do you find significant about these verses in regard to the reasons for Jesus' coming into the world?

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The way Matthew tells it, the healing of the leper takes place as soon as Jesus comes down from the mountain. Fresh from delivering the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus runs smack into the furrow of human need in the valley. And the first challenge He confronts is leprosy, a symbol of our sinful human plight. Jesus touches the leper (what to make of that?), and the leprosy is gone! Such is the power of our Lord.

In what follows in the rest of Matthew 8 and in chapter 9, Matthew would depict Jesus as having *power over nature*: He calms the storm (Matt. 8:23–27); *power over demons*: He frees the demoniacs (vss. 28–33); *power “over sickness, disease, and infirmity”*: He heals the paralytic and the woman with a hemorrhage (vss. 1–9, 20–22); and *power over death*: He brings Jairus's daughter back to life (vss. 18, 19, 23–26). Making it personal, Jesus has power over the storms of our lives, over the demons in our lives, and over the disorders (of whatever description) that plague us.

**What** lessons can we learn from Matthew 8:23–27?

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In certain ancient mythologies, water was regarded as a foe that God overcomes. “To Israel, the raging, unruly waters symbolized the powers which are opposed to God's sovereignty.”—*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), vol. R–Z, p. 809. The reaction of Jesus' disciples should be ours, as well: “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” (Matt. 8:27, NIV). In a way, their exclamation recalls a statement in the first chapter of Isaiah, where God calls heaven and earth to witness the rebellious determination of His people. “The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand” (Isa. 1:3, NIV). Of all creation, His people are the only ones disloyal. So here we may well ask whether we are the only entities of nature to stand in resistance to Jesus. The winds and the waves obey Him. What about us?

## The Sheer Marvel of It

It is not often that one pays attention to the paragraph headings in those modern versions of the Bible that have them. But one in Matthew 9 in the New International Version comes close to a comprehensive description of the wonder of Jesus' works of healing, mercy, and power. "A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman," it says. The words depict the challenge constantly confronting the Savior during His time with us; not the kind of challenge one could bluff one's way through. Yet, Jesus confronted it all. That day, the dead girl came back to life, and the bleeding woman, after 12 years of misery, got a brand-new start.

**Reflect** on the following passages (or at least on as many as you are able). Do not write anything. Just simply be amazed by the sheer marvel of it all, at the wonderful Savior we have. (*Matt. 9:27–34; 12:22, 23; 14:25–31, 34–36; 15:29–31; 20:29–34; Mark 2:1–12; Luke 6:19*).

To grasp the full power of these passages, one must take them slowly, trying to recapture their original setting. In Matthew 12:22, 23, for instance, the man brought to Jesus is both blind and mute. Close your eyes and put a finger over your lips for a while, and try to imagine the condition of that unfortunate soul. In that state you do not know what is around you, and you cannot ask. But the man meets Jesus and leaves His holy presence with eyes wide open and with his tongue unsealed in praise!

Then how about Matthew 15:30, 31: "Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel" (*NIV*).

It even got better. Matthew 14:34–36 and Luke 6:19 tell us that people pressed forward to touch the Savior "because power was coming from him and healing them all" (*Luke 6:19, NIV*).

**Jesus promised that His followers will do greater things than He did. What does that mean? Why are we not seeing such marvels of healing and restoration today? Or, in some places, are we seeing it? How does the church's healing ministry today compare with the example that Jesus set? How can you as an individual in modern times help continue Jesus' healing ministry?**

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## The Motive Behind It *(Matt. 4:23–25)*

Back in the 1980s, undercover investigators conducted a sting operation on certain American televangelists. Noticing that these preachers would invite people to send in their personal prayer requests to the broadcast, with urgent appeals that they enclose a gift “to keep the program on the air,” the investigators wanted to know what happened to those donations and prayer requests. What they discovered shocked them. Staffers for the televangelists would go to the post office, collect the letters sent in by listeners, open them on the spot, fish out the donations, then dump the prayer requests right there in the post office trash bins.

In the key passage above, we read of Jesus traversing the entire area of Galilee, with huge crowds following Him from all across the region. And when Matthew returns to that same theme in chapter 9, he adds a critical dimension that forever distinguishes the motives of Jesus from that of these charlatans of the airwaves.

**Read** Matthew 9:35, 36. How does it describe the motive that propelled Jesus’ ministry?

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The word *compassion* comes from a Greek word (*spilagchnon*) that refers to “the inward parts,” “the bowels,” considered the seat of the emotions in the ancient world. Compassion goes beyond sympathy (which merely can be intellectual). Compassion comes from the inside, from the heart and even the very gut.

That is what Jesus had. For Him, grabbing people’s money and dumping their heartrending prayer requests into post office garbage bins would have been inconceivable. Again and again in the Gospels, the quality of compassion describes His attitude toward the people. A leper begs Him: “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus, “filled with compassion,” reaches out to him: “I am willing. . . . Be clean!” (*Mark 1:40, 41, NIV; cf. Matt. 20:29–34, Mark 10:46–52*).

**If you can imagine someone doing all this with never a thought of personal gain, never a thought that what he is doing will be picked up by the press, or at least will look good on a résumé—with absolutely no thought of personal gain whatsoever—then you are thinking about Jesus. The single force that moved Him was love, love from the belly, love from the gut. The Gospels call it *compassion*. To what extent does compassion like this undergird your feelings and actions toward others?**

## Sign of a New Day *(Matt. 11:2–6)*

From his prison cell, John the Baptist sent an urgent message to Jesus: “‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’” (*Matt. 11:3, NIV*). For the reader of the Gospels, it is a surprising and unexpected question. Was this not the same John who so confidently announced the Messiahship of Jesus at the Jordan (*John 1:29–36*)? And why would he raise the question precisely after he had “heard in prison what Christ was doing” (*Matt. 11:2, NIV*)? What is important for our study here, however, is Jesus’ response: “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (*vss. 4, 5, NIV*).

Jesus’ coded message to John was that His ministry was the sign of a new day dawning; the Messiah had, indeed, arrived. Surely in the back of Jesus’ mind as He spoke were the glorious Messianic prophecies in the book of Isaiah, among others.

**Read** Isaiah 29:18, 19; 35:5, 6; 61:1–3. How do these passages relate to Jesus’ ministry? Why do you think John and others were so slow to catch on?

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The idea of Jesus’ ministry as a fulfillment of prophecy and the dawning of the Messianic age comes through clearly in Matthew’s own interpretation of events, in the way he anchors Jesus’ activities in the broader, Messianic context: “This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases’” (*Matt. 8:17, NIV; citing Isa. 53:4*). We see this same idea playing out in Matthew’s summary description of Jesus’ overall ministry: “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (*Matt. 9:35, 36, NIV; see also Matt. 4:23–25*).

**Looking back, we marvel at how John and others could have been so slow to see who Jesus was. Of course, hindsight is always very clear. What about us today? How might we be just as blind to what should be obvious truths? More important, how can we change?**

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## Sign of the Final Restoration *(Acts 3:19–21)*

The marvelous healing of the demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, rather than bringing shouts of Hallelujahs from the Pharisees, brought instead a charge: “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons” (*Matt. 12:24, NIV*). Thus was Jesus prompted to give an instructive explanation of the meaning of what was happening: “But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God,” He said, dismissing the Pharisees’ inference, “then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (*vs. 28*).

The statement is important, since in the teaching of the Gospels, the kingdom of God is not only a present reality (as evident most directly in the above statement) but also a future reality (*see Matt. 26:29, Luke 23:42, John 18:36*).

What this means is that the works of Christ also look forward to the final restoration. When Jesus applied the pivotal prophecy of Isaiah to Himself during the reading of the scrolls in the synagogue at Nazareth (*Luke 4:18, 19*), He was proclaiming much more than would happen within the brief three and a half years of His own earthly ministry. “The year of the Lord’s favor,” harking back as it does to the ancient Jubilee, was an announcement of the inauguration of the kingdom of God, beginning with the coming of the Messiah, and reaching all the way down to the final consummation, when all prisoners will have been set free, all sight restored, all oppression removed, and when joy will pervade the entire cosmos.

**What** do the following passages teach about the relationship between Jesus’ ministry and the final restoration? (*Mark 5:35–42, Luke 7:11–15, John 11:38–44, Acts 3:19–21*).

The most powerful sign of the reign of sin is death. And the restoration of life by Jesus during His ministry pointed forward to that final day when death will be no more. “I am the Living One,” says the resurrected Christ in John’s apocalyptic vision, “I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever . . . ! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (*Rev. 1:18, NIV*). Those whom Jesus restored to life during His ministry all succumbed to death again. But Jesus looked beyond that, to the final restoration, when “the trumpet will sound, [and] the dead will be raised imperishable” (*1 Cor. 15:52, NIV*).

**How crucial is the hope of the resurrection? What do we have without it? What reasons do you have for trusting in God’s promise to one day destroy, forever, death?**



**Further Study:** Examine the following statement. How does it relate to the overall lesson for this week? Do you see areas of tension? Or does it make the same general point in a different way? Here it is: “The Gospels are filled with accounts of Jesus’ miracles, but it would be a mistake to place our emphasis there. For one thing, Jesus did not himself emphasize them; almost all of them were performed quietly, apart from the crowd, and as demonstrations of the power of faith. We get a better perspective on Jesus’ activities if we place the emphasis where one of his disciples did. Once, in addressing a group, Peter found it necessary to epitomize Jesus’ life, and said, ‘*He went about doing good.*’ Moving easily and without affectation among ordinary people and social misfits, healing them, counseling them, Jesus went about doing good. He did so with such single-minded effectiveness, that those who were with him constantly found their estimate of him modulating to a new key. They found themselves thinking that if divine goodness were to manifest itself in human form, this is how it would behave.”—Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World’s Religions*, p. 210.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Ellen G. White said that “the great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening.” She spoke of a vigorous, worldwide thrust as the end approaches, and said that “miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers” (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 611, 612). How do you see this prophecy coming to pass? How do you visualize your own participation in it? What role does your local church have in all this? What things can we do to prepare for this time?
- ❷ Suppose someone appeared who did many amazing miracles, as did Jesus, miracles that testified to what was clearly supernatural. How could, should, you respond?
- ❸ Bring to class your answer to Monday’s question about modern miracles, and discuss your answers and the reasons for them.

# Thrown Into the River: Part 1

by SUNIL BIKAS TRIPURA

I am from the hills of Bangladesh. From my childhood I was devoted to several gods. I attended festivals, offered gifts to the gods to whom I prayed, and went on pilgrimages, all to receive the blessings of the gods.

On one religious pilgrimage I was dismayed to find the priests asking pilgrims for money to forgive their sins. I could not believe it when I heard them say that the more a poor pilgrim gave, the more surely their sins would be forgiven. *Can I buy forgiveness with money? I wondered. If so, then the rich can be forgiven. But what about the poor?*

I climbed the mountain to the holy place, but when I reached the top, I found drunken priests and pilgrims. Some declared themselves gods in their own right and asked other pilgrims for money to be forgiven.

I knew that these priests and pilgrims were violating the holy writings—and on temple grounds! I thought about it and realized that one god I worshiped had committed at least three of the five forbidden sins. How could a human be expected to stay pure if a god cannot? I wondered who could save me if not these gods.

I began to question my faith. *Is my god the true god? Or is there another God, more powerful, more perfect, One who can overcome sin and take us to heaven?* As I pondered these questions, I determined to start searching for the answers.

One day I met a man who said he is a Christian, a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. When I asked him about sin and forgiveness, he told me that everyone is a sinner, and that Jesus is the only Savior. Only Jesus lived a perfect life, and only Jesus can save us from sin.

I asked the man for a Bible and started reading it. I compared Jesus with my god and discovered that Jesus truly is the only righteous being, the true Savior. I surrendered my life to Jesus, trusting Him to save me.

But my aunt and uncle, who were my guardians, were angry that I had forsaken their gods. They forbade me to touch the food or to drink from their cups, saying it would make them unfit for use. But even worse persecution was to follow.

(continued next week)

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SUNIL BIKAS TRIPURA has completed his religion degree in Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College and is working among his tribal group in Bangladesh.

# The Challenge of His Sayings



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 5:48; 18:21, 22; 19:3–12; Luke 12:32–34; John 19:25–27.*

**Memory Text:** “‘No one ever spoke the way this man does’”  
(*John 7:46, NIV*).

Some of Jesus' sayings present a whole host of values radically at odds with what often is viewed as normal. We are, He says, to turn the other cheek; that is, we are not to resist evil. Of course, almost everyone assumes that evil should be resisted, often by every means possible. *And to love those who are our enemies?* Are enemies not to be hated? It is friends and families we are to love, right? Not according to Jesus.

It gets even more confusing. According to Jesus, it is the outcasts, the harlots, and others like them who will enter the kingdom of God before so many of the so-called *righteous*. How can that be?

Jesus says that the blessed ones are the ones who weep, who are merciful, who are pure in heart. We thought the blessed ones were the rich, the powerful, those who have good looks and plenty of friends, right?

Yet, even those sayings were not the most challenging to come from the lips of Jesus. This lesson examines a few of Jesus' pronouncements that fall into the category of *sayings*, since they are not *teachings* in the strict sense of the term.

What did Jesus mean by these *sayings*? And how are we expected to apply them to our lives today?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 10.*

## About Marriage and Abstinence

**Some** of Jesus' hardest sayings deal with the question of marriage and divorce. Read the following passage. What things are clear? What things are not so easy to understand? Even with what is not clear, what is the essential message that Jesus is giving here?

*Matt. 19:3–12*

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There is much to chew on in the Pharisees' question. Note, for example, the male-oriented nature of the question, " 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?' " (*vs. 3, NIV*). Of course, the answer is no, and Jesus makes that clear (*vs. 4–6*). But the questioners' real motive emerges as we come to verse 7: " 'Why then . . . did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?' " Going beyond Moses, Jesus tightens the terms for a marital split, coming down hard on those men with a yen for ditching wives. On one condition only, He says, marital infidelity. Any other grounds would constitute adultery (*vs. 8, 9*). Shocked, the disciples jump into the discussion: " 'It is better not to marry' " (*vs. 10, NIV*), they state.

Their response provides the impetus for one of the most difficult statements to come from the lips of Jesus.

**Read** again Matthew 19:11, 12. Who are those that cannot accept Jesus' tough line?

Does Jesus mean to exempt them? Who are included in " 'only those to whom it has been given' " (*vs. 11, NIV*)? Are these a special group of morally (sexually) gifted people? What are we to make of Jesus' eunuch reference? How are the three categories of eunuch to be explained, and how do they apply to us? Jesus' most puzzling line comes at the end: " 'The one who can accept this should accept it' " (*vs. 12, NIV*). Is this a Divine concession for people too weak to comply with the high standard He outlined? And if a concession, does it apply to the whole discourse about divorce?

**As is sometimes the case, there are things in the Bible that are hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16). Why is it so important not to get hung up on those things, but rather to focus on and live out what we do understand?**

## About Forgiveness (*Matt. 18:21, 22*)

Jesus, we saw in an earlier lesson, is the embodiment of forgiveness. We return to the subject in this lesson, however, to grapple with the issue as to whether Jesus' statements about forgiveness (in the above passage, for example) are as simple as we sometimes make them out to be.

**Reflect** on Matthew 18:21, 22. What kind of offenses does Jesus have in mind here? How do we apply Jesus' words in cases of repeated sexual or physical abuse, such as within the home? Did Jesus have very egregious offenses in mind, such as when someone kills a pregnant woman, opens up her womb, and steals her unborn baby (as happened in Melvern, Kansas, in December 2004)? Could it be that Jesus, speaking to ordinary people about ordinary offenses, mistakes, and hurts that we experience in our normal interaction with one another, gives a command that does not envision the more complex and sinister cases of human criminality? What do you think?

Known in the media as Girl X, she came to a Chicago court in a wheelchair. Raising her head and making eye movements to communicate, the 13-year-old testified "about the attack in 1997 that left her severely disabled. She was the third witness in the trial of Patrick Sykes, 29, who is accused of raping her, beating her and pouring roach killer down her throat in the attack."—Mike Robinson, Associated Press, *Washington Post*, March 24, 2001, p. A22.

Is Jesus asking the victims of heinous acts to forgive not only the first occurrence but also the seventh? And is He saying that God will never forgive those who find themselves unable to absolve the demons in human flesh that commit them? The point here is not that we should not forgive. Rather, it is whether we may press the gracious counsel of the Lord too far when we apply it to the kind of ghastly, mind-numbing atrocities listed above.

**As you think about the questions above, do not forget Jesus' words on the cross: " 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' " (*Luke 23:34, NIV*). If Jesus is asking God to forgive those who crucified Him (Who did this include? The Roman soldiers? Caiphaz? Pilate? Herod? The chief priests and scribes?), should we not forgive everything? Bring your thoughts to class on Sabbath.**

## About Wealth and Giving *(Luke 12:32–34)*

To the rich young ruler who came to Him, Jesus said, “ ‘Sell everything you have and give to the poor’ ” *(Luke 18:22, NIV)*. Our explanation of this radical command usually has been that Jesus’ stipulation was specific to this young man, based on a prophetic insight into the ruler’s need. Here Jesus put His finger on the one big obstacle between the ruler and salvation: money. But does He not give that same directive to everyone?

In Luke 12:33 Jesus seems to apply to everyone with means the same injunction He gave the rich young ruler: “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted” *(NIV)*.

**How** should we understand this saying? Was Jesus advocating a redistribution of wealth for all Christians in all times and places? What practical problems would arise if we literally carried out His injunction? Take any given community, in which all Christians have sold all their property and given the proceeds to the poor, what now is the economic status of those Christians? How do they support themselves and their own families? And how do they now get the means to carry forward the rest of Jesus’ mission—to take the gospel to new frontiers, for example?

Three considerations may be helpful here. One is to note what actually happened during the course of Jesus’ own ministry: His little group seemed to have had funds on hand—Judas kept them *(John 12:6, 13:29)*. A second is to take a careful look at what happened in the early church, among those Christians closest to the life setting of Jesus’ statement. (In Acts 4:32–37 we witness what appeared to be an orderly, voluntary process as they sought to follow Jesus’ injunction.) A third consideration is to examine what happened in the early church beyond the book of Acts (in the letters of Paul, John, Peter, etc., we see no wholesale selling of property).

**When you take all these things, as well as the whole Bible (which does not condemn wealth, per se), into consideration, what do you think was Christ’s point? How does Luke 12:34 catch the essence of His message?**

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## About Perfection *(Matt. 5:48)*

For many people, one of Jesus' most puzzling statements comes in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Matt. 5:48, NIV*). Across the centuries, conscientious Christians have struggled to reach the standard to which they thought Jesus Christ was pointing, a state of complete victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Some have flagellated and beaten themselves; some have gone on pilgrimages; others have sought it through stringent keeping of the law. The goal is altogether worthy in every case. But is that what Jesus was calling for in Matthew 5?

**Compare** the following pairs of scriptures. Notice how they inform and balance each other:

*Matt. 10:34–39 and Luke 14:26, 27*

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*Matt. 7:7–11 and Luke 11:9–13*

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*Matt. 5:48 and Luke 6:32–36*

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The seemingly harsh language of Jesus in Luke 14 is mollified by its parallel in Matthew 10, which gives us, we think, a better grasp of what Jesus was trying to say. And whereas the Matthew 7 passage on prayer has Jesus promising us, upon the asking of "good gifts" (*vs. 11, RSV*; "good things," *KJV*; which can inadvertently focus the mind on the material), Luke has Jesus pledging, instead, "the Holy Spirit" (*Luke 11:13, NIV*)—a considerable shift in perspective.

The same kind of synthesis takes place in respect to the final pair of texts. Where Matthew has Jesus saying, "Be ye therefore perfect," (*Matt. 5:48*), Luke reports His words as, "Be ye therefore merciful" (*Luke 6:36*), which, according to both contexts, comes closer to what Jesus meant. In Luke the context speaks about loving our enemies, and lending without expecting anything back. Doing things like that, Jesus says, makes us "sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked" (*vs. 35, NIV*). Then follows immediately the statement, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (*vs. 36, NIV*). In Matthew the situation is identical, the verse on being perfect preceded by talk of love to enemies, prayer for those who mistreat us, and about God sending rain equally on the righteous and the wicked. Jesus thus wanted to encourage us to be just like our heavenly Father, who is kind to all and shows no partiality. That is what *perfect* in this context means. It is a high order, to be sure, but what higher ideal can a Christian strive for?



## About Family *(John 19:25–27)*

A young woman joined David Koresh's ill-fated group back in the 1990s and was at the group's Waco, Texas, compound when her mother passed away in Canada. As she prepared to leave for the funeral, the charismatic guru intercepted her plans. No need, he said, to expend time and funds for such mundane purposes; there are more important things to do on the compound. She never went.

**Read** the following sayings of Jesus: *Matt. 10:34–37, 12:46–50, Luke 9:59–62, 12:49–53, 14:26*. **How would you answer the charge that they tend to give aid and comfort to charismatics like Koresh (and others) who denigrate natural family ties and loyalties?**

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“This reconfiguration of family values—driving a wedge between earthly and heavenly, . . . becomes a major theme in Luke’s gospel. . . . In addition to statements embracing all who keep God’s word as true kinfolk (8:19–21; 11:27, 28), . . . Luke’s Jesus lays down the shocking mandate to ‘hate father and mother’—even to the point of leaving a dead father to bury himself!—as a condition for discipleship (9:57–62; 14:25).”—F. Scott Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do?* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 35.

Jesus’ statements sound harsh to the modern ear, to be sure. But are they really so, when you understand what they mean? In the case of letting “the dead bury their own dead” (*Luke 9:60, NIV*) for example, had the father of the potential disciple actually died? Or was that person saying, in effect, “I will follow you after my father dies, and I have secured all the property”? And how should we understand Jesus’ statement in *Luke 14:26* that no one can be His disciple who “‘does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life’ ” (*NIV*)? As pointed out in yesterday’s lesson, the Matthew parallel throws light on Jesus’ meaning here, by Jesus talking in the Matthew text about those who love father and mother and wife, etc., more than Him (*see Matt. 10:37*). “In the Bible, ‘to hate,’ often should be understood simply as . . . ‘to love less.’ ”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 811. The idea Jesus was trying to get across was the importance of putting God first.

**Oftentimes our familial bonds are the strongest earthly bonds that we know, and rightly so. Why, though, must God always come first, even before family, if need be?**

**Further Study:** No question, some of Jesus' sayings are hard to understand, especially if taken in isolation. When, however, we view them in context, particularly with other *corrective* statements that balance them out, many of them become much easier to understand. Even then it becomes clear that following Jesus cannot be a halfway thing. Either we give ourselves to Him completely, regardless of the cost, or we do not give ourselves to Him at all.

“Celibacy is not the ordinary, normal state, and it is a deception of the devil that, of itself, it can lead to a superior state of holiness than would otherwise be possible. Among the Jews celibacy was frowned upon or pitied, and it was practiced only by extreme ascetic groups such as the Essenes. . . . The Scripture record states specifically that Peter was married, and probably the other disciples were as well. . . . Jesus never recommended celibacy, either for Christians as a whole or for Christian leaders. It is not natural, and does not contribute to the development of a symmetrical character in the way that normal married life can.

“The words of our Lord [in Matt. 19:12], if understood literally, would run counter to the whole tenor of Scripture. The idea of bodily mutilation is abhorrent. It seems proper to see this statement as analogous to Christ's declaration in Matthew 5:30” (about cutting off an offending limb).—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 455, 456.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ The above statement on celibacy seems to have a particular religious culture in mind. But in what ways might it, unintentionally, bring discouragement to ordinary Christians who are single or widowed, or who for other reasons find it appropriate to be celibate? In what ways can we affirm people who have made that choice?
- ❷ Bring your answers to Monday's final question to class, and discuss the question of whether forgiveness does or should have limits.
- ❸ It is one thing to spout scriptures about how God has to come first, even before family; it is another, of course, to actually exercise the faith to do that. In most churches around the world, there probably will be people who have been alienated greatly by their families because of their faith. What about your own church? Is there anyone there who has lost family because of their adherence to Jesus? If so, how can you, as a church family, help make up the difference?

## Thrown Into the River: Part 2

by SUNIL BIKAS TRIPURA

As a teen I gave up my belief in many gods and became a Christian, mostly by reading the Bible. But my decision angered many people. Friends forsook me, and the girl I hoped to marry left me to marry another. And when my grandfather died, the villagers refused to let me attend his funeral ceremony. Instead they grabbed me and threw me into the nearby river.

I had no Christian friends, no one to comfort or encourage me. I cried to Jesus, “Are You the true God? If so, where are You? I am persecuted. Have You no power to help me?” But I felt no answer to my prayer, so I stopped reading the Bible. I looked elsewhere for a god I could believe in, but other religions seemed full of confusion. Desperate, I picked up the Bible again and opened it at random. It opened to the book of Job. There I found courage.

I again met the man who had given me the Bible. I told him of my problem, and he encouraged me to be faithful. With his help I recommitted my life to God.

I wanted to continue my studies at the Adventist college in Bangladesh, but without my family’s support it seemed impossible. I searched for work, but the only job I could find was at a cigarette factory. I had only 500 *taka* (about U.S. \$8). It would not pay for even a week of school. Once more, discouragement set in.

I stopped at the church’s headquarters and received encouragement not to give up on my dream to study. Encouraged, I asked God for 1,000 *taka* (U.S. \$16) from my family, those who had turned from me when I became a Christian. That would be enough to at least enroll in school. I told my uncles about my need, and they gave me almost 3,000 *taka*, more than I had asked God for.

I enrolled in the school and supported myself by selling books. I want to become a pastor and work among my tribal people, only a few of whom are Christians. I have begun working among my people, and I see them listening and accepting God’s message of love. So far 35 people attend the little Sabbath School in my village and some nearby villages. They have no church in which to worship, so my goal is to provide a simple house of worship for them.

God has called me to this task, and I will not turn back. I have seen how God has led me in the past, so I have confidence He will provide for me as I follow His leading. Your mission offerings help me in my work of leading people who have never heard the name of Jesus to the foot of the cross.

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SUNIL BIKAS TRIPURA *has completed his religion degree in Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College and is working among his tribal group in Bangladesh.*

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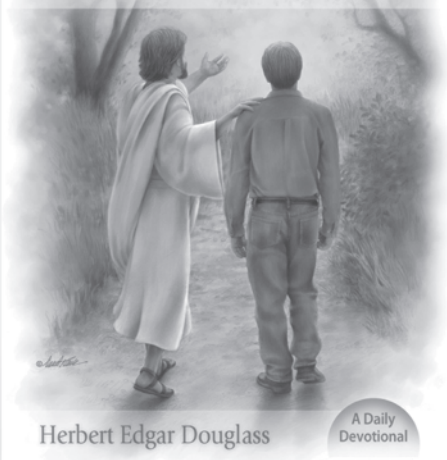
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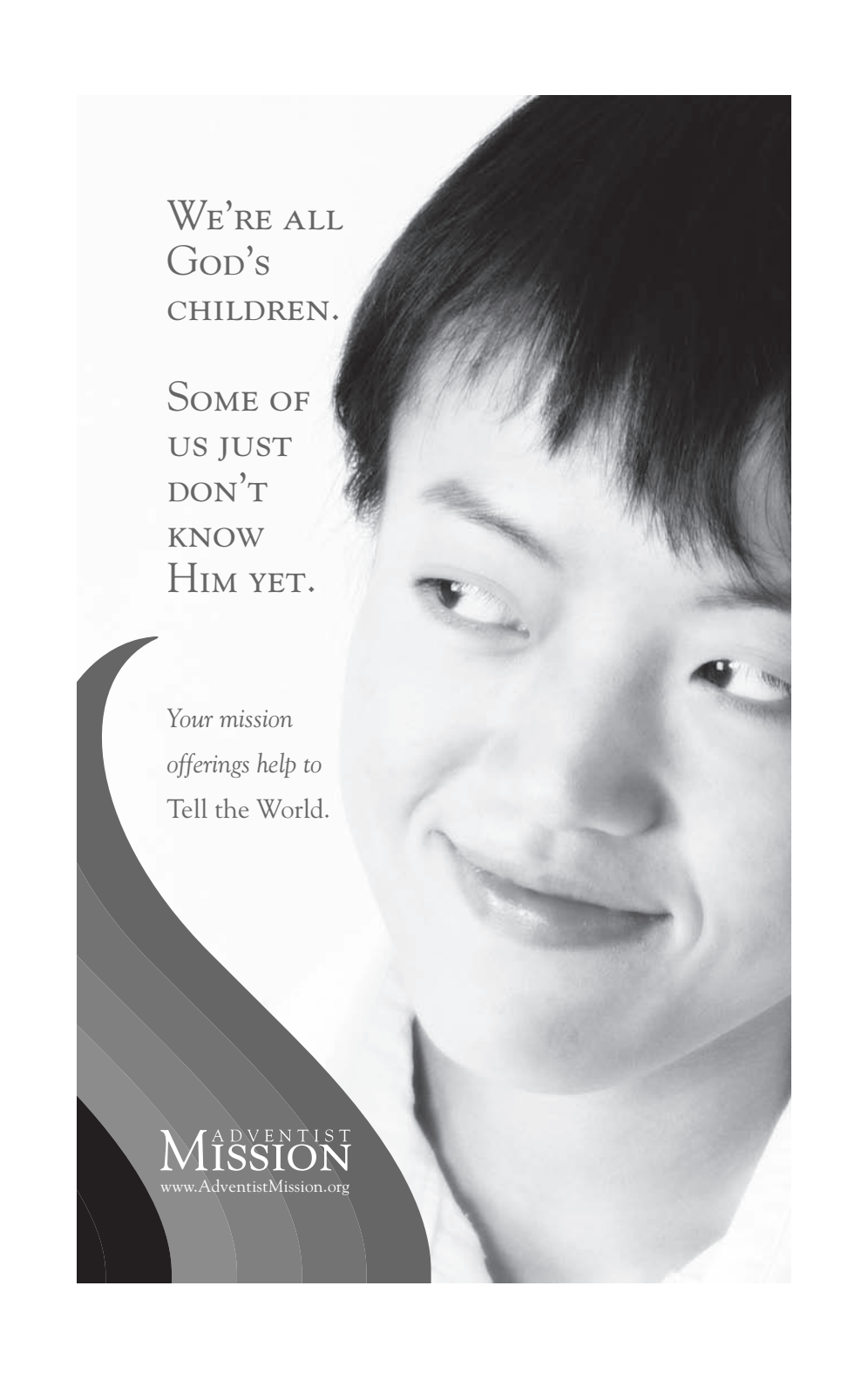
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Recently the pope ratified statements that Protestant "ecclesial communities" are "defective." He has stated that "we intensify our endeavors towards 'the holy objective' of reconciling all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ."

Surely it's time to read again the messages for these last days that have been given to us from God through Ellen White.



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# The Puzzle of His Conduct



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 4:12, 13; 8:28–32; 11:18, 19; 21:12, 13; Luke 2:41–51; 5:32; 1 Cor. 1:26–28.*

**Memory Text:** “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners” ’” (*Matthew 11:19, NIV*).

Last week's lesson focused on sayings of Jesus that leave contemporary people scratching their heads. This week's lesson probes similar issues, but in respect to His conduct.

One of our problems with Jesus is our perennial temptation to recreate Him in our own image. The revolutionary makes Him out to be one of them; social conservatives believe they have Him in their corner. To an extent, that is unavoidable. After all, our own culture and situation form the matrix through which we both consciously and even unconsciously view reality. But to be conscious of this fact offers some hope that we can begin, at least in some limited way, to transcend it, and attempt as objective an approach as we can to the Jesus we find in the Gospels.

Once we do that, we discover that it is not easy to pigeon-hole Him, not easy to place Him in a tidy little package with the word *solved* on top. Instead, we find ourselves genuinely puzzled by aspects of His conduct, wondering, *Does He expect us to do that, and in the same way?*

This week we will look at some of the more puzzling actions of Jesus in order to learn what we can apply and, perhaps, not apply to our own lives.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 17.*

## Neglecting Parents?

As stated earlier, the Gospels are almost totally silent on the first 30 years or so of Jesus' life. Though not much is given, there is one account of this time frame that gives us pause.

**Read** Luke 2:41–51. At first sight, what impression does the passage leave about Jesus' regard for His parents? On the other hand, what else might have been going on here? What hint could be found in verse 47?

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The incident, on the face of it, gives the impression of an irresponsible lad, utterly uncaring about the pain and anxiety of his parents. What parents would not be terribly angry at such apparently callous disregard for their convenience and the rules of their home?

This is one of those events that show the limits of using Jesus' conduct as a model in every case. What is happening here, it would seem, is that Jesus' Messiahship has already begun to shine through at the tender age of 12. He is becoming conscious of an allegiance to a Power infinitely higher than His parents, however much He respected them. The brevity of Luke's account leaves a dozen questions unanswered, such as Who fed and housed the lad those three days? Did the priests have any concern to find His parents?

**Read** Jesus' response to His parents. What was He telling them, at least indirectly?

“But,” Luke reports, “they did not understand what he was saying to them” (*Luke 2:50, NIV*). Jesus would return home with them and, as a child, be subject to them (*vs. 51*); but He had taken pains to establish the position of a higher loyalty. Nor is there any indication that He ever apologized for the terrible inconvenience He had caused His anxious parents.

**Jesus' entire life was guided by the supremacy of God and God's kingdom, even at the cost of being misunderstood. In what ways might your loyalty to God be misunderstood by others? If this has ever happened to you, what did you learn that could, perhaps, help someone else going through a similar experience?**



## Displaying Anger?

When Jesus descended the Mount of Transfiguration, a man emerged from a crowd at the base with a request that Jesus heal His son. He had taken the boy to the disciples, the man explained, but they had been unable to cure him. Jesus' response, as it comes through in translation, gives the impression of being peeved by the request. " 'O unbelieving and perverse generation,' " He replied, " ' . . . how long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me' " (*Matt. 17:17, NIV*). At the very least, such words seem uncharacteristic of the One we have come to know as the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." How might we explain Jesus' tone here? It is a difficult call. The Gospels mention other occasions when Jesus certainly appeared angry, as well.

**How** do you understand the following passages? (*Matt. 21:12, 13; Mark 3:1–5*).

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Many Christians consider that the way for us to proceed with choices in our complex, contemporary world is to ask, What would Jesus do? It sounds simple enough, until one asks the logical preliminary question, What *did* Jesus do? Here we discover that the answers are not always as simple as we may think. What, for example, are the implications of the above passages for our own conduct today?

"Presuming that what Jesus would do today has some correlation with what he actually did then—in first-century Roman Palestine . . . —how in the world might a contemporary Christian go about replicating and applying these bizarre incidents of tree-cursing and temple-disrupting? If our favorite grocery store happens not to stock a particular fruit we are craving—because it's out of season!—do we proceed, with Jesus' blessing, to curse the fruit bin, the produce manager, and everything else in sight? And if the preacher goes on too much about money one Sunday or if we are just generally miffed at various church personnel and programs, do we bust in during a worship service and start upending pews, pulpits, altars—anything not nailed down—and bouncing ushers from the premises?"—F. Scott Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do?* p. ix.

**What principles should we bring to bear upon such questions? Where does spiritual common sense come in? Jesus came as the Messiah, the Savior of humanity. How do we distinguish what He did strictly in that role from that which He intends for us to follow?**



## Destroying Personal Property?

An underlying concern of this week's lesson centers on the way we use Jesus as our model. How straightforward is the goal of "following His example"? And what we are noticing is that it is a matter that calls for the most careful thought and discrimination. There are certainly cases—the majority, in fact—sin which we detect a clear, ethical example to follow; in others the principle is not very clear. Two cases:

**Read Matthew 8:28–32** (compare Mark 5:1–20, Luke 8:26–39) and **Matthew 21:18, 19** (compare Mark 11:12–14, 20, 21). **Why do you think Jesus allowed the demons to enter the herd of swine? Would He have done the same thing if the animals had been sheep? Where is the sympathy in Jesus' action here? Was there a concern on His part that, regardless of His own dietary strictures, the herd, nevertheless, represented the livelihood of one or more families in the town? How would the idea of compensation fit into this picture?**

"If these swine were owned by Gentiles, we should be left without a real explanation for their destruction. To say that the devils were ordered merely to leave the men, and that their entering the swine was their own act, contradicts their request to Jesus and the plain statements of Mark and of Luke that Jesus gave them permission."—R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), p. 353. Another Bible scholar sees in Jesus' action "a powerful protest." "The name 'Legion' and the pig mascot," he says, "both signify Roman military occupation." Thus Jesus' intention was to "protest against oppressive Roman possession of Israel."—F. Scott Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do?* p. 101.

**Ellen G. White says that "it was in mercy to the owners of the swine that this loss had been permitted to come upon them. They were absorbed in earthly things, and cared not for the great interests of spiritual life. Jesus desired to break the spell of selfish indifference, that they might accept His grace."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 338. While these comments might help us to understand certain calamities that come upon us personally, how do you see it setting any precedence in regard to our own action? Or is this one of those actions pertaining to Jesus' role as Messiah-Prophet, and not intended as an example for us to follow, as such? How would you make the case that the same is true in regard to the cursing of the fig tree (which probably had a personal owner)?**

## Neglecting the Persecuted?

In His most dramatic depiction of the last judgment, Jesus tells about when He will divide the nations gathered before Him into two groups, the sheep and the goats. To the sheep He says, among other things, “‘I was in prison and you came to visit me’” (*Matt. 25:36, NIV*).

**Read** the following texts in the light of Jesus’ judgment pronouncement. Give your immediate impression on how you think the text relates to His prison reference in the judgment.

*Matt. 4:12, 13*

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*Matt. 11:2, 3*

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*Matt. 14:1–13*

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How is Jesus’ conduct during the imprisonment of John to be explained? Upon first hearing of John’s incarceration, He returns to Galilee (*Matt. 4:12*). And all the evidence suggests that John did not receive a visit from his illustrious contemporary while in the dungeon, a clear implication of Matthew 11:2, 3. According to the passage, John dispatches his disciples to Jesus with a question; that being, apparently, the only means of contact available to him. Following the visit of John’s people, Jesus launches into high praise for the embattled prophet but does not visit him.

One of the most persistent questions we face as human beings centers around the issue of suffering: Where is God when we hurt? In the experience of John, we have a partial answer, in terms of Jesus’ conduct. Though He was God in human flesh, with power to act, Jesus does not intervene to rescue the one who had helped prepare the ground for His own ministry. And following John’s murder, all we get from Jesus (who, we suspect, felt it keenly) is silence. Nor is it likely that He or His disciples attended John’s funeral.

**How** would you explain Jesus’ conduct during this dark time for John? What were the probable extenuating circumstances that might have played a role in His decision? (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 316, which suggests that the authorities were attempting to silence both John and Jesus.)

**And how can His behavior during the entire episode with the Baptist help us understand the silence of God in our own times of trouble?**

## Hanging Out With *Undesirables*

Most of us have a doctored image of Jesus. And however often we hear that He associated with those whom His own society considered unacceptable, our imagination either holds back from going all the way or goes too far. Often, rather than quietly coming to grips with what that aspect of Jesus' life should mean for us today on a personal basis, we use His behavior to beat one another on the head, for being too exclusive, too conservative, in regard to the more seedy elements of society. One suspects, however, that a careful examination of Jesus' relations with the *undesirables* of His day would leave most (if not all) of us feeling at least a tad uncomfortable.

**Examine** the following passages. What message can we take from them? *Matt. 9:10–13; 11:18, 19; Luke 5:32; 1 Cor. 1:26–28.*

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If we apply these passages to our times, our imagination should see Jesus sitting down with people of questionable morals in settings of deepest fellowship (as was mealtime in the ancient world). Eating and drinking are taking place; loud and raucous music is heard; practicing prostitutes lurk in the shadows. That is the setting, and that is precisely where Jesus went.

Interestingly, it is from Jesus Himself that we learn about the most pejorative labels His enemies promulgated about Him: that He was “a glutton and a drunkard” (*Matt. 11:19, Luke 7:34, NIV*). “These slurs would never work against a John the Baptist or a Gandhi, but for one who spends as much time as Jesus does frequenting and talking about dinner parties and banquets, they make a point, even if exaggerated.”—F. Scott Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do?* p. 90. However exaggerated, it was nothing short of extraordinary for the Savior of the world to be charged with inebriation and overeating.

**What can we learn from these texts that we can apply to our own lives? What should we not apply? As you answer, think about what purpose Jesus had for being with these people. How does that answer help us understand what practical principles we can take away?**

**Further Study:** “Jesus saw in every soul one to whom must be given the call to His kingdom. He reached the hearts of the people by going among them as one who desired their good. He sought them in the public streets, in private houses, on the boats, in the synagogue, by the shores of the lake, and at the marriage feast. He met them at their daily vocations, and manifested an interest in their secular affairs. He carried His instruction into the household, bringing families in their own homes under the influence of His divine presence. His strong personal sympathy helped to win hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151.

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with [people] as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is *righteous anger*? When is it legitimate, and when is it not? Take your thoughts to class for discussion.
- 2 How is Jesus’ relationship with the *undesirables* of society a guide for us? Under what conditions might our association with sinners become a peril to our own souls? In all His social contacts, Jesus seemed to be in charge. What should that say to us in our own attempts to penetrate the more questionable areas of society?
- 3 To what extent is Jesus’ conduct a model for us today? To what extent is it not? What are other examples of His conduct here that might be problematic for us to follow?
- 4 Think more about this idea of being misunderstood by others as we seek to follow God’s will. Though we see examples of this, such as in Jesus’ early life, why must we be careful? That is, some people have done some very damaging things to themselves and to others, all because they believed that God told them to. How do we know for sure that God is calling us to do certain things that might cause us to be misunderstood? Why should we be open to the counsel of others before we do things that we are convinced that God told us to do? At the same time, how can we be careful not to impede someone who is being led by God in ways that might seem strange to us?

# Daniel's New Song

by DANIEL NEWMANN

I was born in Brazil, but my parents took me to America when I was still a baby. I was a good kid, but in junior high things changed. I got interested in punk rock music, and it changed my life. I wore punk-style clothes and hung out with punk friends. I started drinking and smoking marijuana with them, and soon I was part of their culture.

When my mom realized what I was involved in, she freaked out. She had sent me to a good school so I would make good friends, and suddenly I was going the wrong way. Although my mom had some weird religious ideas, she started telling me how much God loves me and how Jesus died for me. Because of her prayers and encouragement I stopped smoking and drinking.

But I still loved punk music, and it drew me into a culture that spelled trouble. Mom tried to show me the dangers hidden in the lyrics of my music, but I would not listen.

My punk friends never made fun of me when I refused to join them in drinking or smoking. However, in time I realized that there was no future in the gang, and I began to pull away. But when the gang realized that I wanted to leave, they told me that if I left they would kill me. I was afraid, for they had killed another boy who had betrayed the gang.

I told my parents that my life was in danger. My mom understood and suggested that I go to Brazil. I had spent summers there, so I agreed. She found a Christian school on the Internet and enrolled me.

I arrived at school—an Adventist boarding school—and liked it immediately. Everyone was friendly. And the music I heard there touched my heart. One Sabbath as the choir sang, I felt God speaking to me through the music. I knew that I was where God wanted me to be. I could relate to the speaker, who told how God had rescued him from a terrible life. By the end of the service I knew that I wanted to be a Christian. I began studying the Bible, and I shared with my mother what I was learning.

Mom had enrolled me in this school to save my life, but God used this school to save my soul. I want my mom to believe in God the way I am learning to believe. I once loved punk music, but God has given me a new song, a song I love to sing.



DANIEL NEWMANN [left] is a student at an Adventist academy in eastern Brazil.

# The Intensity of His Walk



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 4:4, Luke 2:40, 6:12, John 4:34, John 17, 1 John 2:6.*

**Memory Text:** “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (*1 John 2:6, NIV*).

Adventists are a peace-loving people. We feel elated when the church or its members get positive press, when everybody thinks we are good. But how might we react if we woke up one day to find huge headlines in the media branding us as losers, disrupters, or insurrectionists? Would our sense of assurance and confidence in God be strong enough to sustain us? We admire Jesus after the fact; but do we have any idea what it meant for Him to be vilified and demonized by the highest civic and ecclesiastical powers of His day?

In the end we see Him manhandled by Roman soldiers: “They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. . . . Then they led him out to crucify him” (*Mark 15:17–20, NIV*).

What prepares a person to endure such physical and psychological abuse without cracking? How does a person remain steadfast and calm when the whole world turns against them—with not a shred of visible human support in sight? For Jesus, the answer lay in His communion with God, in the intensity of His walk with Him—which forms the subject of this week’s lesson.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 24.*

## The Early Years *(Luke 2:40)*

As we have stressed already, we know very little about Christ's early years. We hear about His birth and very early years, including the visit to the temple at age 12 (*see Luke 2*). But that is all, until His baptism by John at the start of His public ministry, when He was "about thirty" (*NIV; see Luke 3:21–23*).

Nevertheless, it is possible to look at His life, as we know it, and draw certain reasonable conclusions in respect to the spiritual foundation that gave it support. If we assume from our own experience that the stability and strength we see in Jesus during His public ministry did not materialize overnight nor arise from shallowness and superficiality, then we are bound to conclude, again from our own experience, that they sprang from an intense walk with God.

**Read** again the story of Jesus at the temple (*Luke 2:39–52*). **What things are found there that help us understand the spiritual foundation upon which the young Jesus grew? Also, what role did His parents play in His growth?**

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Incredibly, these passages (apart from the birth narratives) are all we have on the first 30 years of Jesus' life. Furthermore, biblical scholars estimate that the vast majority of the Gospel materials center on the final week of Jesus' life, making them (as has often been said) "Passion narratives," not biographies, as such. They were produced, evidently, for the well-defined purpose of shining the spotlight on the two critical events of the Christian faith: the mystery of Jesus' birth (the Incarnation) and the significance of His death and resurrection. Between these two events we see His unselfish life of service and sacrifice. And we correctly may assume that the focus and dedication we see in His public ministry represent the flowering of a relationship with God that was consistent, deeply personal, and intense.

**What principles can we take from this story that we, in our own context, can apply to ourselves and our own spiritual life?**

## At the Start of His Ministry *(Matt. 4:4)*

Following His baptism, Jesus goes out into the Judean desert for 40 days to pray, to reflect upon His mission. Perhaps none of us studying this lesson has had any personal knowledge of what that means. Here we come face-to-face with an intensity we can hardly grasp, a spiritual concentration much beyond our usual experience, a pursuit of intimate closeness with God that leaves our mouths wide open.

But the explicit reason for this wilderness foray was for testing *(Matt. 4:1; cf. Luke 4:2)*, and the tempter was on hand to take advantage of the opportunity. Using the Savior's extreme hunger as his tool, he desperately tried to drive a wedge between Jesus and His Father, to wrench Jesus' firm grasp on God, to break the intensity of His walk with Him, to intrude upon the intimate closeness.

**How** does Jesus' response, as revealed in the following texts, show the intensity of His walk with God? What can we learn from this that we can apply to ourselves? *(Matt. 4:3–10, Luke 4:3–12)*.

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To understand what is going on here, we need to keep in mind Jesus' unique status in the whole scheme of salvation. He was the spotless Son of God. Coming into the world in human nature, He had to live completely above the sinful sphere, not just for a day, but for His entire time with us. He was to struggle as we do, to be tempted as we are, yet He had to remain immaculate. We might compare it to going through 33 years with your computer, writing articles, doing homework, answering letters, and never making a single mistake, never needing to use the delete key or the undo feature; or to going through a course in algebra or physics, and getting every problem right; or to playing the piano for 33 years without ever hitting a wrong note.

That was Jesus' lot. He came, not just to set an example in selfless living, but to die as the sinless One, and thereby bring salvation to the planet. Hence His total concentration, the utter intensity of His walk with God; nothing could be taken for granted, nothing left to chance. A single misstep, and the game was over.

**Imagine what it must have been to have never sinned, not even in thought, during His whole life. That is what righteousness is all about. Dwell on what you owe to Jesus, who offers you what you could never attain yourself.**



## In His Life of Prayer *(Luke 6:12)*

Jesus lived for prayer. His public ministry began with an extended period of special prayer and communion (as we saw yesterday), and the record indicates that He returned from the experience supercharged with living power (*see Luke 4:14*). It would have been unnatural for Him to go a single moment without lifting up His soul to God, without experiencing that living connection between Himself and Heaven. And what we find is that although His was a life of continuous communion with His Father, before every major event or development He took time for special supplication.

**How** do the following passages demonstrate Jesus' reliance upon God for guidance, direction, and strength during moments of high importance, stress, or danger? In each case, note the special event in question:

*Matt. 14:23 (compare vss. 24–33)*

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*Luke 6:12 (compare vss. 13–16)*

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*John 17 (compare 18:1–3)*

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Mark 1:35 seems to be describing not just one instance, but rather a pattern, when it speaks about Jesus rising “a long while before daylight” (*NKJV*) and going out to “a solitary place” (*NKJV*) for prayer. He began each day with God. But times of special need increased the tempo. Luke 6:12 informs us that Jesus spent the entire night in prayer on a mountainside immediately preceding the selection of the Twelve Apostles, apparently from among a larger group of followers (*see Luke 6:13*). Before His jaw-dropping walk on the lake, He had taken time out for a period of intense communication with His Father. And during the Passion Week, as He faced the Cross, Jesus offered an intense supplicatory prayer for His immediate disciples and for His people to the end of time.

**Take another look at Jesus' great prayer in John 17. What elements of a deeply personal walk with God do you find there? What events drive you to your knees? What has been your experience with the power of prayer to sustain you? How might you improve your prayer life?**

## Intensity for Mission *(John 4:34)*

For American poet Robert Frost in “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” the woods were “lovely, dark and deep/ But I have promises to keep/ And miles to go before I sleep.”

Jesus lived with the constant awareness of the darkness in the “woods” around Him, always deep, but never lovely. Like the poet, He constantly was aware of having miles to go before He slept, so much to do in so little time. “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day,” He said, “the night is coming when no one can work” (*John 9:4, NKJV*). We see this mission intensity in His encounter with the woman of Samaria. Suddenly, in the presence of this needy soul, He forgets all hunger and all thirst, totally consumed with the mission at hand.

Meanwhile, the woman, entering into the excitement of the encounter, abandons her water jar and rushes to the village to spread the news of the most focused character she has ever met. The disciples return to find Jesus silent and pensive, praying for the success of this brand-new contact.

**When** the disciples told Jesus to eat, what did He answer them? (*John 4:32–34*). **How** should we understand those words? **What** message can we take from them for ourselves?

**What** do the following passages say about the intensity of Jesus’ passion for His mission? *John 9:1–12, 35–39; 12:27–36*.

Jesus’ sentiments in that last passage are pregnant with meaning. They came following a request by certain visiting Greeks to meet Him (*John 12:20–22*), a request that opened up before Him the possibility of personally taking the message of the kingdom beyond His native Palestine to the far corners of the earth. But He knew that to do so would run counter to the most vital aspect of His total mission, to give His life as a ransom for the nations. Hence, He follows with those powerful words about a kernel of wheat falling into the ground (*vs. 24*), symbolic not just of His own sacrifice but of the principle that all who follow Him must have a full commitment to the will of God, regardless of whatever the personal cost might be.

**What has been your own personal experience with what it costs to follow Jesus? Why is the cost cheap enough, no matter how expensive it turns out to be?**

## Our Own Walk With God *(1 John 2:6)*

**Read** prayerfully the above text. What is the principle there for us to follow? Realizing, as we have in previous lessons, that we cannot (and should not) do everything that Christ did, how do we, nevertheless, make this text real in our own lives? In what ways are we to walk as Jesus walked?

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The idea of *walking with God* has its roots in hoary antiquity. Perhaps the first explicit biblical reference to the idea comes in Genesis 5:22, 24. Verse 24 says, “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away” (NIV). The Hebrew word for *walked* there appears in a form that implies a kind of continual, ongoing walk, something that happened all the time. Whatever his faults and struggles, Enoch kept a consistent walk with his Lord.

We, as Christians, have the opportunity to do the same. However, it is so easy to let other things get in the way of that walk.

**Wherever** you live, whatever your culture, what are the things that so easily can hinder your walk with God? Too much leisure time? Too much distraction? Too much to do? Too much work in order to just survive? Once you identify these concerns, what practical steps can you take to try to prevent these things from hurting you spiritually?

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Read what Jesus said in Matthew 13:22. What is He saying there that, in many ways, is the essence of what we are talking about today? Thus, it is clear that none of these things can really be a valid excuse for losing our way, because the Lord already has foreseen them. How crucial then that we, to the best of our God-given ability, make the daily choices, as Jesus did, to keep our walk with the Lord intense and ongoing. Why should we give the tempter anything at all to hold on to, and thus turn us away from Jesus?

**Further Study:** “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

“In every possible way Satan sought to prevent Jesus from developing a perfect childhood, a faultless manhood, a holy ministry, and an unblemished sacrifice. But he was defeated. He could not lead Jesus into sin. He could not discourage Him, or drive Him from the work He had come to this earth to do. From the desert to Calvary the storm of Satan’s wrath beat upon Him, but the more merciless it fell, the more firmly did the Son of God cling to the hand of His Father, and press on in the bloodstained path.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1130.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 The grudging compliments paid to Jesus in Matthew 22:15, 16 speak of Him as a person of integrity and truth, as unswayed by people’s office or power. What would people say about you? Could they offer you a similar kind of compliment? What about on a larger level, the level of your local church? Is it as willing to help the lower stratum of society as it is to try to impress the *higher-ups*? What does your answer tell you about changes that need to be made, if any?
- 2 As a class, go over what you wrote down in Thursday’s lesson regarding the things that can hamper your walk with the Lord. Compare notes with other class members. What did you list in common? What were the differences? Even more important, how can you work together to help each other get past these challenges? What practical help can you give each other?
- 3 In Matthew, Jesus frequently is mentioned as spending time on mountains and teaching on mountainsides. Finally, He is transfigured on a mountain (*Matt. 17:1–9*). This association with higher ground is meant, perhaps, to signify the daily closeness Jesus experienced with the higher realms of reality. What are the ways that we, as a church, can work together to reach, in a sense, the upper regions, even while intensely engaged in the valley below?

# The Drunkard and the Tailor

by FULGÊNCIO CHALUFOIA

I was a drunkard, and my drinking robbed me of everything. But a humble tailor helped me find my way back from the edge of hell.

I live in Mozambique. I kept my drinking a secret until my wife and I were married. I hoped to stop drinking, but I was powerless to stop. The harder I tried to stop, the worse my drinking became. My wife threatened to leave me if I did not get help.

I went to a witch doctor, but he could not help me conquer my addiction. Sometimes I was so drunk I beat my wife. Finally she left me.

Desperate to stop drinking, I bought a Bible and began attending church. One Sunday on my way to church, I met a tailor working in his roadside shop. “Where are you going?” he asked.

“To church,” I replied.

“Why are you going today?” he asked. “Yesterday was God’s Sabbath day.” Curious, I stopped to talk. The tailor told me that God has the answer to my problems and offered to teach me from the Bible.

The tailor could not read, but he knew the Bible. He sat down beside me, opened a notebook filled with Bible references, and pointed to one. “Look this one up,” he said. I found the Bible verses and read them. Then he explained to me what they meant.

We read many Bible texts, and the tailor explained each one to me. Finally he told me to read Exodus 20. I read the Ten Commandments and suddenly I realized that I was finding truths I had never known.

I asked the tailor what church he belonged to, and he said he belonged to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He told me where the church was located and invited me to visit. I thanked him and promised to be in church the next Sabbath. I then continued on to the Protestant church to tell my friends what I had just learned and to invite them to come to the Adventist church on Sabbath.

The next Sabbath I found the Adventist church and worshiped there. In that church I found God’s peace and the power to overcome alcohol and tobacco. It took some time, but with God’s help, I never smoked or drank again.

My drinking cost me everything—my job, my wife, my home. But God has given me my life back. I am happy in Jesus, and I have invited my friends to find Jesus as well. At least 15 have come to know God’s truth and joined the Adventist church because I shared with them what God has done for me.

Your mission offerings help bring the gospel to thirsty souls everywhere.

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FULGÊNCIO CHALUFOIA *shares his faith in Chimoio, Mozambique.*

# The Tenderness of His Love



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 5:44–48; 19:13, 14; 23:37; Luke 10:38–42; John 8:2–11; Acts 6:7.*

**Memory Text:** “But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (*Matthew 9:36*).

**M**atthew 9:35 tells how Jesus went through many areas of Palestine “preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (*NIV*). In our cynical age, when people suspect that every effort to help them is tinged with some hidden agenda, the motive behind Jesus’ ministry comes as a breath of fresh air: genuine love, described as “compassion” (*vs. 36*). He was moved for the people; His heart went out to them. We see this same general concern in Mark 8:1–3, where Jesus is concerned about the people fainting on their way home. “They have . . . been with Me three days,” He reminds His disciples, “and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance” (*vss. 2, 3, NIV*).

This is a remarkably tender concern that says a lot about Jesus. He knew His audience. He empathized with their needs. He felt their pain. Nor does He ask us to be exactly what He was or to do exactly what He did. Although He had gone through 40 days of fasting, He was concerned about the health and safety of those who had experienced just three days eating next to nothing (though perhaps not totally without food).

This is the kind of loving compassion we want to trace in this week’s lessons, in the lives of individuals and that of the nation of Israel.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 31.*

## For the Woman Caught in Adultery

(John 8:2–11)

**Review** the story of the woman caught in adultery. Though Ellen G. White made it clear that the woman was set up (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 461), there was still no question of her guilt. Nevertheless, how did Jesus treat her? What can we learn from this story?

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“In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner, and reaches to her a helping hand. While the hypocritical Pharisees denounce, Jesus bids her, ‘Go, and sin no more.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 462.

What tender compassion and love on Jesus’ part! He handled the situation in such a way that forever afterward the woman’s accusers would be eager to leave her alone, since they never could be sure what she had read about their private lives on the pavement that morning.

**In** what ways was Jesus ministering even to the hypocrites who brought this woman to Him in order to try to snare Him?

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If you read the story carefully, you can see the compassion of Jesus even for those who were so evil in their intentions. If only their hearts would have been as open to the wooing of Christ as was that unfortunate woman’s.

**How would the typical Adventist congregation handle a situation like this? How do we balance adherence to high moral standards with compassion for those who fall?**

## For the Children *(Matt. 19:13, 14)*

Children have borne the brunt of suffering over the centuries. Helpless and dependent, they often have been caught in the crossfires of wars and conflicts, public riots and family feuds. It was children, infant males in particular, who bore the brunt of the first hideous “solution of the Jewish problem” under the ancient pharaohs of Egypt (*Exod. 1:15, 16*). And it was infant males who again were decimated in Herod’s slaughter of the innocents (*Matt. 2:16*), leading Matthew to recall another time of indiscriminate slaughter of children at the start of the Babylonian captivity (*Matt. 2:17, 18; compare Jer. 31:15*). Learning about Herod’s slaughter, perhaps on His mother’s knees, how keenly Jesus must have remembered it, knowing that these innocent little ones had died, in a sense, because of Him. (He had come to die for them; but before He was old enough even to conceive of His mission, they had died because of Him.)

**How** do the following passages capture Jesus’ tender love and concern for infants and children? What messages are being given to us in these accounts that go beyond how we should treat children? (*Matt. 18:2–6, 19:13–15*).

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Those children who sat on Jesus’ lap that day and to whom His hand had been outstretched in blessing, what might their future have been? What memories did they take from that day, those old enough to remember? Did some of them later accept Jesus as the Messiah? And how must they have felt to know that that loving Person who had put His hands on them in blessing was now in the highest heavens ministering in their behalf? What depth of assurance that must have brought them! Politicians kiss babies for their parents’ votes; but Jesus loved the children for their own sake. “Let the little children come to me,” He scolded His protective disciples, “and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (*Matt. 19:14, NIV*).

**What children, if any, are within your own sphere of influence? How do you respond to them? Think carefully about how you treat them. What steps can you take to make sure your influence is as positive as possible?**



## For the Lazarus Family (*John 11:5*)

We do not know a great deal about the Lazarus family of Bethany. The Gospels provide us with little about them. But it seems clear that they were three unmarried adult siblings keeping house together. Probably not your typical Jewish family, but that is where Jesus chose to go whenever He came to town. John informs us that “Jesus loved Martha and her sister [Mary] and [their brother] Lazarus” (*John 11:5, NIV*).

**Study** the incident recorded in **Luke 10:38–42**. How do you see Jesus’ handling of Martha? How, even here, do we see the loving compassion of Jesus being manifest?

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Martha’s request seems eminently justified. After all, the meal lay at the center of Eastern hospitality, and preparing it had to count for something. Perhaps too poor to afford servants, Martha in the kitchen needed help. In light of all this, Jesus’ response to her comes across as uncharacteristically uncaring.

Perhaps the key to understanding it is to consider the wider dimension of Jesus’ mission. For Jesus, nothing was ordinary, as His own parents discovered during the incident at the temple (*Luke 2:48, 49*). For Jesus, destiny hung upon every minute of His time with us, and in that context, kitchen work did not count, regardless of its importance.

Still, we misunderstand Jesus if we think He was unsympathetic to Martha. Quite the opposite is the case. The Gospels do not provide us with video clips of the incidents they report. We cannot see the face of Jesus as He responded to Martha. We cannot hear the pathos in His voice. Using our imagination, however, and informed by what we know of Jesus elsewhere in the Gospels, we may picture Him rising from His place as He addresses Martha, affectionately calling her name twice. “Martha, Martha,” He says, making His way to the kitchen, Mary following, “there’s something infinitely more important than entertaining, and Mary has found it” (*Luke 10:41, 42, paraphrase*).

**In what ways might you be in the position of Martha, so busy with the cares of this world that you forget what is really important? Most important, how can you tell if your priorities are not right?**

## For His Enemies *(Matt. 5:44)*

**One** of Jesus' most famous sayings was found in Matthew 5:44–48. Review the verses. What is the essence of this important message to all who would follow Jesus?

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In a real sense, one could say that Christ's whole life and death were a manifestation of this principle, that of loving your enemies, that of doing good even to those who do not do you good.

After the Fall of Adam and Eve, the whole world became, in a sense, *enemy territory*, a race of fallen and rebellious beings living in opposition to God. What, though, did God do to this enemy planet? Did He send an army of angels down to sweep it away in its iniquity? No, instead, He sent Jesus, His Son, who came to save the world, not to condemn it.

**What** overt examples can you find in the Gospels that show the love of Jesus, even for His enemies? Which ones stand out the most in your mind?

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How about, for example, when He healed the ear of the servant when Peter cut it off (*Luke 22:50, 51*)? Or how about the time He revealed to Judas His foreknowledge of what Judas was going to do, giving the hardened disciple another opportunity to turn away from his sin (*Matt. 26:25*)?

Of course, the greatest example has to be His prayer to the Father as He was being crucified: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (*Luke 23:34*). In many ways that is the ultimate example of love for those who do not deserve it; though they did not know what they were doing, they had no excuse. During His time here, Jesus gave ample opportunity, to both Jews and Romans, to know who He was, or at least to know enough to know that Jesus did not deserve what He was getting. Despite that, Jesus showed His compassion for them anyway.

**It is one thing to say you are supposed to love your enemies; it is another to know how to do it. What is the key to manifesting this attribute in your own life? How willing are you to make the changes needed in order to be able to love your enemies?**

## For Israel *(Matt. 23:37)*

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” *(Matt. 23:37)*.

**How** is the character of Jesus revealed in the above text? What does it tell us about God’s love for His people? What does it tell us about the limits of what love can do? At the same time, before you start pointing fingers at anyone, ask yourself: How might those words be applied directly to me?

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If God shared the same emotions as humans, then the story of His relationship with Israel would amount to four thousand years of almost continuous disappointment and frustration. To be sure, there were high points, times when the nation brought God joy, but those times were rare and comparatively brief. Eventually, His phenomenal patience running out, God gave the nation a period of 490 years (*Dan. 9:24*) that would reach to the coming of Messiah. Jesus was that Messiah; and what we see in Him, from start to finish, was an attitude of compassion, a love at once tough yet tender.

**How** does Matthew 23:25–35 exemplify the toughness of Jesus’ love?

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What we are watching here is the phenomenon of Divine patience nearing its end. Yet, however severely provoked, and however protracted the provocation, tenderness breaks through the outer crust of Jesus’ toughness. He would not have spoken those harsh words were there not hope that some of these people eventually would see the error of their ways.

**Read Acts 6:7.** Notice who was also “obedient to the faith.” Might some of them have been among those Jesus rebuked earlier? What is the message to us here about being quick to judge or condemn?

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Lazarus Come Forth,” pp. 524–536; “Before Annas and the Court of Caiaphas,” pp. 710–715; “Judas,” pp. 720–722, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In the work of soul-winning, great tact and wisdom are needed. The Saviour never suppressed the truth, but He uttered it always in love. In His intercourse with others, He exercised the greatest tact, and He was always kind and thoughtful. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave unnecessary pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He never made truth cruel, but ever manifested a deep tenderness for humanity. Every soul was precious in His sight. He bore Himself with divine dignity; yet He bowed with the tenderest compassion and regard to every member of the family of God. He saw in all, souls whom it was His mission to save.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 117.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell on this idea of loving your enemies. What does that mean, in a practical sense? How is this love to be manifested? Is there a time when it would be impossible to love your enemies? If so, what might that situation be?
- ❷ What is the situation of the children in your local church? How much attention is paid to their needs? What could you as a church be doing better in that regard?
- ❸ In what ways is it easy to confuse love with cheap grace? That is, what danger is there of allowing people to get away with things that they should not be doing, all because we want to reveal to them *love*? When is love sometimes best manifested by strict, moral accountability? How can we strike the right balance? If you are going to err, which side is it best to err on?
- ❹ What parallels can you find between the Jewish nation (during the time it was a theocracy) and the Adventist Church today? What lessons should we learn from their example? Are we learning them?

## Rosswick's Church

by NOS TERRY

Aniwa is a tiny island in the Vanuatu group in the South Pacific. The island is home to about 500 people, but the Seventh-day Adventist Church had no presence there. However, Adventists on nearby islands have been praying to reach these people. Recently God answered those prayers.

Rosswick lives on Aniwa Island. He was a leader of a cargo cult\* for years, and traveled to a neighboring island to attend cult activities. Occasionally, when he could not return to his home because of rough seas, he would stay with Adventists on the host island.

He watched his Adventist hosts pray and noted how they took their religion seriously. And he went to church with them. He learned a few Christian songs and enjoyed their hospitality until he could return home. During his visits, he became convinced that Adventists were right in what they believed, for they lived according to their actions.

These small acts of kindness made a big impact on Rosswick. In a bold move, he stepped down from leading the cargo cult and pronounced himself a Seventh-day Adventist Christian.

He cleared a piece of land and built a small thatched grass house-church in which to worship. Every Sabbath morning he took his little granddaughter to worship in the church. They sang the three Christian songs they knew; he told the child that God loves them both and that Jesus is coming back someday. Then they prayed. After their simple Sabbath worship service, Rosswick and his granddaughter returned to their house to pray and rest. At sunset Rosswick and his granddaughter returned to the grass church, sang the same three songs, prayed, and closed the Sabbath.

I visited Rosswick shortly after I heard his story and was humbled to realize how God used this man to light the flame of truth on a dark island.

Today on Aniwa Island the door is fully open to the Adventist message. Youth groups have visited in homes and introduced the Adventist message, and today a Global Mission pioneer is fanning the flame of faith on this tiny island. Because of Rosswick's faithfulness and world mission offerings, today many others on Aniwa Island are worshipping with Rosswick and his granddaughter each Sabbath.

\* A cargo cult is a religion that rose out of European efforts to colonize the islands of the South Pacific. Cargo cults focus on material goods that followers hoped would come to them if they worshipped certain deities.

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NOS TERRY is the Sabbath School, Personal Ministries, and Global Mission director in the Trans Pacific Union Mission, part of the South Pacific Division.

# The Meaning of His Death



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 27:45, 46; Luke 2:25–35; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:18–21; Gal. 6:14; Heb. 2:17.*

**Memory Text:** “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (*Mark 10:45, NIV*).

A cover article in a major magazine reported on a discussion in a men's Bible-study group. The topic? The reason for Jesus' death. Among the questions asked in the discussion were such things as, What if God's plan were merely for Jesus to come and give us good teachings, such as loving our enemies? Or did He have to suffer and die, as well? If so, why? Why wouldn't the teachings be enough? And even if He did die, what has that to do with us, today, many centuries later?

Almost two thousand years after His death, the meaning of the Cross is still a subject that challenges Christians. In fact, even before His death, the prophets constantly tried “to find out the time and circumstances” to which the Holy Spirit was calling their attention, “when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (*1 Pet. 1:10, 11, NIV*).

So, this week we will seek to try to answer the important question of why Jesus died, what purpose was accomplished by His death, and what it means for us many centuries after the fact. Did Christ, as some assert, die merely to show us God's love, and thus to change our feelings about God; or did Christ's death, in fact, do something that changed how God relates to us? These are all topics worthy of our deepest interest.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 7.*

## Born to Die

**Read** Luke 2:25–35. What is the meaning of this passage? What is the message to Mary? What is its message about Jesus?

This story, told only by Luke, is powerful in its simplicity and profound in its implications. The devout Simeon, meeting at last the Messiah for whom he had been waiting, reveals the Infant's future to His parents with cryptic terseness: " 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. . . . And a sword will pierce your own soul too' " (*Luke 2:34, 35, NIV*). The word for "sword" in the Greek signifies a huge, Goliath-type instrument, destined to pierce the heart of Mary, a prediction of the agony she would experience at the Cross. "These mysterious words of Simeon must have passed over Mary's consciousness like a chilling and ominous portent of things to come."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 704.

**What** do the following passages tell us about the death of Jesus? Was it something that had to happen? (*Matt. 16:21; 26:52–54; Mark 10:45; Luke 18:31–33; John 3:14; Heb. 9:25–28*).

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The consistent note here is that Jesus was born to die; His death was not an accident. It *had* to happen. Why did it have to? Well, that is not a matter that can be explained fully by rational processes, not because it is irrational, but because it is *suprational*, above human reason. It falls in the realm of Divine revelation, part of that "mystery . . . kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints" (*Col. 1:26, NIV*). The Bible does not go into any long attempt to justify it or to explain it, maybe because it is not something subject to human logic. We do not have other instances elsewhere by which to judge or compare it. Biblical atonement represents a solo occurrence in the history of the universe. And our task is to seek to understand what the Bible says about it and to apply what it means to our own lives.

**The fact that Jesus had to die in order to atone for our sin should tell us something about how serious sin really is. How seriously do you take the sin in your own life? What efforts are you making to overcome?**

## How It Happened *(Matt. 27:45, 46)*

The Gospels devote an immense amount of space to the final week of Jesus' life. In Matthew, it occupies one-third of the book. In Mark, more than one-third. And one-quarter of Luke and one-half of John are devoted to it. Clearly, the central focus is on Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. The Gospels are not biographies; they should be seen, rather, as theological summaries of the significance of Jesus' death.

**Relive** the awful events of the Passion by reviewing the following passages: *Matt. 27:27–31, 45–54; Mark 15:21–32; John 19:28–30*. **How do they make you feel? What is your overwhelming emotion, and why?**

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None of us ever can claim to understand the full meaning of Jesus' death or the circumstances surrounding it. What seems clear, however, is that the role played by those physically present and active (whether at His trial or at the cross) was theologically incidental, so far as the participants' racial or national identities were concerned. To malign Jews today, or modern Italians for that matter, for the involvement of some of their ancestors in the death of Jesus is theological stupidity, an attitude contrary to the very essence of biblical religion. The individual guilt of those involved in His death will be a matter between them and God. Instead of pointing fingers, maybe we should ask ourselves, What might we have done were we, ourselves, there? In one sense, actually, we were!

**Read Matthew 26:38. What was it that hung so heavy on the Savior during this crushing agony? How did He manage to survive the ordeal? (See Luke 22:43.) “Having made the [final] decision,” wrote Ellen G. White, “He fell dying to the ground [there in the garden]” (The Desire of Ages, p. 693). This means that although He later was killed by Roman hands, the fatal blow had come much earlier, delivered by one giant, collective hand, ours. How does it make you feel, knowing that your own guilt caused the death of Jesus? More important, how should you respond to those feelings?**



## What It Accomplished: Part 1

**What** is the central focus of these following passages? (1 Cor. 2:2, 15:3, Gal. 6:14).

The writers of the New Testament used a variety of metaphors, images, and pictures in their attempts to express the saving work of God in Christ. In this lesson (and in Wednesday's) we sample a few:

1. *The Concept of Sacrifice, Offering, Substitute*—Ephesians 5:2: Christ “gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering [*prophoran*] and sacrifice [*thusian*] to God” (NIV). Hebrews 9:26: He came “to do away with sin by the sacrifice [*thusias*] of himself” (NIV). Hebrews 10:14: By means of “one sacrifice [*prophora*] he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (NIV).

The idea in all these passages is that of vicarious death, death in our place, death as our Substitute. Vicarious suffering is suffering endured by one person in the stead of another. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, Paul says that “Christ died for our sins” (NIV); Romans 5:8 says that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (NIV); and 1 Peter 2:24 says that Christ “bore our sins in his body on the tree” (NIV).

2. *The Concept of Ransom*: The word *ransom* derives from the Greek term *lutron*; the basic idea conveyed is that of a payment for something delivered. In classical Greek the term often was used in connection with the redemption of slaves and war prisoners. The sacred writers borrowed the concept and pressed it into the service of a grander theme (*Matthew 20:28; compare Mark 10:45*): Jesus came “to give his life as a ransom [*lutron*] for many” (NIV). (Here “many,” incidentally, means “all.”)

The family of words from which *lutron* comes puts the finger on the substitutionary nature of Christ's sacrifice. He gave His life *for us*, the tense of the verb *gave* in the original Greek pointing to a specific event in time, to Jesus' death on the cross. The basic concept here is that we were slaves to sin, condemned to eternal death, and unable to free ourselves; but Jesus came as our ransom, our *lutron*.

**Think about the things that you have done wrong, things you knew were wrong but did them anyway. What does it mean to you to know that Someone Else, Jesus, Someone innocent, received in Himself the punishment that would, otherwise, be yours for those things (and others) you did?**

## What It Accomplished: Part 2

Yesterday, we discussed two of the many metaphors employed by the writers of the New Testament to express the accomplishments of Christ's death. Here are two more:

1. *The Concept of Propitiation (or Expiation) (hilasterion)*: In regard to the mission of Christ, the word is found in Hebrews 2:17, where it speaks of Christ making "propitiation for the sins of the people" (*NKJV*). "Propitiation" has the sense of pacifying someone. The belief was that when a god was angry, the people should make a gesture of appeasement (*hilasterion*) in order to render the god *hilaros* (happy, joyous) once more. What students of the New Testament repeatedly have noted, however, is that its authors, though borrowing vocabulary from classical Greek and elsewhere, nevertheless fill that vocabulary with brand-new content and meaning.

Accordingly, many Bible scholars agree that a better English translation of the word is "expiation." So understood, the idea is that by means of Jesus' death, God "expiates," "covers," "erases" our sin. Any idea of human appeasement of God would be utterly foreign to the New Testament writers. Instead, they wanted to emphasize that the entire human race, threatened by the righteous wrath of God on account of sin, was rescued by Jesus' death. Jesus became our *hilasterion*, covering us from the wrath of God (*see Heb. 9:5*).

2. *The Concept of Reconciliation (katallage)*:

**Read** the following passages. What important emphasis do they share in common? (*Rom. 5:10, 11; 2 Cor. 5:18–21; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20–22*).

Sin is departure from God and God's will. It puts us into a condition of estrangement from God, a state whose end result is death.

Reconciliation speaks of the restoration of harmony between us and God, the recovery of wholeness. And here is a critical point to note: It was God who took the initiative (*Rom. 5:8–11*). "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (*2 Cor. 5:19*). Because of sin, the whole world stood condemned before a righteous God; because of the Cross, our standing before God changed, and thus all who come to Jesus by faith have the assurance of eternal life.

**Because of the Cross, you have the opportunity by faith to stand perfect, holy, and accepted by God. In what ways, on a daily basis, should your life reflect this new standing that we can have through Jesus?**

## The Security of the Universe

The cross has become the central symbol of Christianity. And in the theology of the New Testament, it says several things about the human condition, pointing beyond itself to its ultimate accomplishment.

**Examine** the following passages. What do they say about the human condition and about the need for Jesus' death? (*Rom. 3:10, 23; 1 Cor. 2:2; 15:3; Gal. 6:14*).

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The Greeks and others in the ancient world thought of humanity as basically in good moral health. Given the right opportunity, our natural, innate goodness will blossom and flourish, they believed. The attitude represented a significant challenge for Christianity, with its concept of universal human depravity and our desperate need for outside intervention. That is why Paul could say that “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (*1 Cor. 1:18, NIV*). That quiet power, he said, will eventually conquer, and “every knee [in the universe] should bow, . . . confess[ing] that Jesus Christ is Lord” (*Phil. 2:10, 11, NIV*).

Yet, however central to our salvation, the Cross has an importance that goes beyond us.

“The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels. Fallen men could not have a home in the paradise of God without the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. . . . The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God. The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1132.

**Even the angels in heaven are guarded from apostasy because of the Cross! What an incredible thought! If the Cross means so much to unfallen beings, those whose lives were not even redeemed by it, how much more so should the Cross be the central focus for us, we who have been redeemed through it?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Calvary,” pp. 744–757; “It Is Finished,” pp. 758–764, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Well, then, might the angels rejoice as they looked upon the Saviour’s cross; for though they did not then understand all, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. Christ Himself fully comprehended the results of the sacrifice made upon Calvary. To all these He looked forward when upon the cross He cried out, ‘It is finished.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 764.

“The death of Christ upon the cross made sure the destruction of him who has the power of death, who was the originator of sin. When Satan is destroyed, there will be none to tempt to evil; the atonement will never need to be repeated; and there will be no danger of another rebellion in the universe of God.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1132.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Some limit the Cross to a mere demonstration of God’s love, devoid of any legal or atoning efficacy. That is, Christ died merely to show us the Father’s love; there was no change in our legal standing before the Father. Hence, the only purpose of the Cross was to bring a change in us and in our attitude toward God. Why is such a position a radically weak and ultimately unsatisfactory view of Jesus’ death? How does such a view, of necessity, lead to a salvation-by-works theology?
- ❷ Dwell more on this idea of the universe being made secure by the Cross. What does this tell us about the Cross and about the grand issues that it dealt with? How does our understanding of the great controversy help us better appreciate what happened at the Cross?
- ❸ The life and death of Jesus present us with mystery from start to finish. Though there are aspects that we can understand, other things remain a mystery. How can you learn to trust the Lord regarding the things you do not understand? What is the key to keeping your faith strong?

## Kobamo's Urgent Message

Kobamo is the eldest son of a poor cattle herder in southern Ethiopia. His parents wanted a better life for him, so they sent him to school. There Kobamo met some Adventist children. Kobamo knew almost nothing about God, but he listened as his classmates shared their faith with him. Over time he realized that God loves even him, a poor farm boy.

He could not attend the Adventist church with them, for he had many chores to do on Saturday. However, sometimes he attended special afternoon programs when his work was done. In time Kobamo accepted Jesus as his Savior.

Kobamo's grandfather was a witch doctor, an important and feared man. One day Kobamo felt an urge to visit his grandfather, who lived an hour's walk away. In Kobamo's culture children do not associate with their elders, even their grandparents. So Kobamo's parents were surprised when he asked to visit his grandfather. Nevertheless, they allowed him to go.

Kobamo finished his chores and set out for his grandparents' home. The sun was low in the sky when Kobamo reached their home. His grandparents were surprised to see Kobamo, and they invited him to come in and sit down. But Kobamo stood up saying, "I will not sit down until I have told you what I have come to say. God sent me to tell you to believe in Him."

Kobamo did not have a Bible, and he did not know many Bible texts to quote to his grandfather. He just knew that his grandfather needed to believe in God. So Kobamo, in his childish way, simply urged his grandparents to believe in God.

Kobamo's grandparents were surprised that this young boy would talk to them in this way. For four hours Kobamo told his grandparents what he knew about God and asked them to believe.

Finally Kobamo's grandfather told the boy that he believed that God had sent Kobamo to share this message. The couple knew nothing about God except what Kobamo had told them, but because their young grandson spoke so bravely to them, this influential couple accepted Jesus as their Savior and faithfully attended church until their deaths.

Kobamo's parents joined another Protestant church, but Kobamo insisted on attending the Adventist Church. He obeyed his parents in everything, but he refused to work on God's holy day. His parents allowed Kobamo to follow his faith, for they had seen God working in his life.

Our mission offerings help spread the gospel in Ethiopia, where half the population follows non-Christian religions. Thank you for sharing Christ through your mission offerings.

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*KOBAMO continues to share his faith in southern Ethiopia.*

# The Power of His Resurrection



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 27:62–66, Luke 24:36–39, Acts 3:14–16, 1 Corinthians 15, Phil. 3:7–10.*

**Memory Text:** “**I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!**” (*Revelation 1:18, NIV*).

As Easter approached, a teacher sent her students out into nature around the school. She gave each a little box with the following assignment: Bring back something in the box that is a symbol of life. When the children returned, each box was opened, one at a time. The first box had a butterfly, which flew away as she opened the container. Another had leaves. Another twigs. But then one box she opened was empty.

“How stupid!” one student exclaimed. “Somebody didn’t do the assignment!”

At that point, Philip, a boy with Down’s syndrome, spoke up: “That’s my box.”

“Well, Philip,” the same boy continued, undeterred, “you messed up the assignment!”

“No,” replied Philip, confidently. “The tomb was empty!”

On that day Philip became a respected member of the group. He died not long afterward, and at his funeral all the members of the class brought empty boxes to the service, in honor of their fallen classmate.

Yes indeed, the tomb was empty! And in that empty tomb we find the great hope of all Christians everywhere. This week we look at that hope, which is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 14.*

## The Story of the Resurrection: Part 1

(Matt. 27:62–66)

Several events may be described as pivotal to Christianity, among them the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Second Coming. But in a sense, the Resurrection trumps them all, even the Cross that we extolled in last week's lesson. For without the Resurrection, nothing else matters. Indeed, when we talk about the death of Jesus, we logically include the Resurrection, unstated. It is the central doctrine of the Christian faith.

Of all the world religions, Judaism and Christianity are the only two that espouse the concept of a resurrection, as such; and only Christianity makes it central. Only Christianity has been founded on the belief that its central Figure actually was raised from the dead. All four Gospels cover the extraordinary event, and they tell the story with a straightforwardness that makes it utterly credible.

**What** contribution does each of the following passages make to the credibility of the Resurrection story to follow?

*Matt. 27:50–53*

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*Matt. 27:54–56*

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*Matt. 27:57–61 (compare Mark 15:42–47)*

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*Matt. 27:62–66*

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The occurrences listed here are all public. Given the date of the Gospel of Matthew (believed to be written before A.D. 70), eyewitnesses still would have been alive either to confirm or refute these reports. Nor would the religious establishment have had any interest in letting such claims and assertions go unchallenged if false: The rending of the temple curtain "*from the top*"! (certainly some of those who had ministered in the complex that day would have seen something); the earthquake would have been public and universal for the immediate area; the resurrection of dead people and their appearance to many in the city (what possible reason could the writer have for manufacturing a detail like that!); the witness of the Roman centurion and his fellow soldiers; the sealing of the tomb; the posting of a special guard; the list goes on. These are concrete events, related with no special pleading or defensiveness whatsoever.

## The Story of the Resurrection: Part 2

(Luke 24:36–39)

In yesterday's lesson, we began listing a group of passages in the Gospels that describe events surrounding the death of Jesus, events that in their straightforward and unembellished naturalness commend the credibility of the Resurrection story. Following are a few more passages in the same vein.

**What** essential message is found in these verses? What key point do all of them have in common? (*Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24:10–44*).

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Although the above list does not carry any reference from John, all four Gospels cover the Resurrection in considerable detail.

**Why** do you think that is so? What is so important about the Resurrection to our faith?

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“The historic faith of the Church has agreed with St. Paul: ‘If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile’ (1 Cor. 15:17). All other Christian doctrines are dependent upon the proclamation of the resurrection: the significance of Christmas lies in the fact that the child who was born is the one whom God raised from the dead; Good Friday is only the anniversary of one more martyrdom, unless he who died is the one who rose again; the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the Church would have been unthinkable, had not the Lord been known to the faithful in the breaking of bread.”—Alan Richardson, ed., “Resurrection of Christ,” *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 290.

**In the texts for today, we see the power of Jesus’ resurrection, both physically and spiritually. He broke the shackles of the tomb; the Roman seals gave way; the grave burst open. And He declares today, “I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!” (Rev. 1:18, NIV). If you were asked to say in ten words or fewer what the Resurrection means to you, what might those words be?**



## It Empowered a Movement *(Acts 3:14–16)*

How could such an outlandish belief as the resurrection of a dead prophet spread through a pagan empire like that of Rome if it had no credence? Why would a bunch of fishermen and tax collectors, against all odds, invent such a story? And if they did invent it, how did they come to believe it so strongly themselves that they were prepared not only to forsake family and friends to defend it, but to give their lives for the sake of the One they proclaimed as the risen Christ?

The arrest, trial, and execution of their Master had left these followers broken, traumatized, defeated. Disillusioned, the erstwhile inner circle began falling back upon old patterns, moving back into their accustomed grooves (and they themselves tell the story). We hear only about going fishing (the former livelihood of most of them); but there also must have been a lot of brooding by the likes of nonfishermen, such as Matthew and Simon the Zealot, wondering where to go from there, what to do next.

Flash ahead weeks later, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (*Acts 2*). As Peter delivered his impromptu Pentecostal sermon, it was his reference to Jesus as a living person, risen and exalted before the heavenly Father, the astonishing declaration that Jesus was alive, that hearers homed in on. “‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” they responded (*Acts 2:37, NIV*).

Nor was the emphasis on the Resurrection a fad for these early believers, an ephemeral novelty to be abandoned when something better came along. Quite to the contrary, the Resurrection constituted the central element of apostolic preaching, with Peter and the other apostles repeatedly returning to it in their discourses.

**Read** Acts 3:11–16, 4:8–12, 7:54–56, 17:29–31. What theme do they constantly refer to? And why?

“For the earliest Christian preaching it is the Resurrection that designates Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. . . . This is the point at which his reign as Messiah begins, when . . . he enters upon and inaugurates the age of GLORY.”—*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. R–Z, p. 44.

**Writing to the Philippians, Paul spoke of wanting to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (*Phil. 3:10, NIV*). What do you think that means? How can we today experience the power of the Resurrection in our lives? (See, for example, *John 3:3, Rom. 6:1–12*.)**

## Provided Authority for Witnessing

(Phil. 3:7–10)

We see the power of the Resurrection in the ministry of the apostles. Peter's words to the cripple are anchored solid in a resurrected Savior: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (*Acts 3:6, NIV*). Then as the people go wild with astonishment and wonder over the miracle, Peter reminds them of the trial and death of Jesus (*vss. 13, 14*) and then begins to move toward the good news, his goal from the start: "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead" (*vs. 15, NIV*). And, says Peter, it is through the power released by His resurrection that the crippled man was made to walk. "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man . . . was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing" (*vs. 16, NIV*).

The spectacular miracle notwithstanding, Peter is arrested and called upon to answer for these unusual developments: "By what power or what name did you do this?" (*Acts 4:7, NIV*). With such an invitation, Peter falls back on what fast was becoming his favorite theme, the resurrection of Jesus: "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed" (*vs. 10, NIV*).

So, on three separate occasions now, Peter has zeroed in like a laser beam upon the resurrection of Jesus as the source of his power for witnessing. In fact, the very preaching of Christ implied His resurrection (*Acts 5:40–42*).

"The conviction that Jesus continued to live transformed a dozen or so disconsolate followers of a slain and discredited leader into one of the most dynamic groups in human history. We read that tongues of fire descended upon them. People who were not speakers became eloquent. They exploded across the Greco-Roman world, preaching what has come to be called the Gospel but is literally the good news. Starting in an upper room in Jerusalem, they spread their message with such fervor that in their own generation it took root in every major city of the region."—Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), p. 215.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's great treatise on the Resurrection. How central is this truth to the Christian faith? In other words, how much hangs on it? Do you have loved ones who have passed away? What particular sections of Paul's treatise bring you the greatest comfort?**

## Guarantees Our Own Resurrection

(1 Cor. 15:20)

No matter how clear the New Testament is on the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus, some liberal theologians, trapped in a purely scientific and rationalist worldview, argue against the Resurrection being real. Instead, they say that the Resurrection should be seen as a myth, a metaphor of a new resurrected life we can have here and now if and when we accept, as a community, the moral teaching of Jesus.

However nice that might sound, it is a view based on human thinking and not on the clear teaching of God's Word, which is exceedingly clear and unequivocal in the literalness of Christ's resurrection.

For us, there is no danger accepting the Resurrection as a metaphor, not if we take the Word of God for what it says; and it is explicit about the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus. And once we are settled in our acceptance of the Resurrection, then we can for ourselves garner the hope it offers us in the face of death. Regardless of what happens to us in this life, we have the hope that, as Jesus rose from the dead, so will we. The promise of the Resurrection helps us to keep everything in its proper perspective.

**Read** the following passages. What hope do they hold out for our own resurrection?

*John 5:25–29*

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*John 11:23–26*

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*1 Cor. 15:51–58*

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*Rev. 1:18*

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The resurrection of Jesus established three certainties: (1) Our destiny is secure in Jesus (*1 Pet. 1:3–5*); (2) death is a vanquished foe (*1 Cor. 15:20–22*); and (3) power is available to share this fantastic news with others (*John 14:12, Acts 1:8*).

**How should the hope and promise of our resurrection from the dead help us to keep our life here, and the things that happen in it, in the proper perspective? Imagine what life would be like if you did not have this hope.**

**Further Study:** “Over the rent sepulcher of Joseph, Christ had proclaimed in triumph, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ These words could be spoken only by the Deity. All created beings live by the will and power of God. They are dependent recipients of the life of God. From the highest seraph to the humblest animate being, all are replenished from the Source of life. Only He who is one with God could say, I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 785.

“During His ministry, Jesus had raised the dead to life. He had raised the son of the widow of Nain, and the ruler’s daughter and Lazarus. But these were not clothed with immortality. After they were raised, they were still subject to death. But those who came forth from the grave at Christ’s resurrection were raised to everlasting life. They ascended with Him as trophies of His victory over death and the grave. These, said Christ, are no longer the captives of Satan; I have redeemed them. I have brought them from the grave as the first fruits of My power, to be with Me where I am, nevermore to see death or experience sorrow.”—p. 786.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Take another look at 1 Corinthians 15, the flagship theological defense of the Resurrection in the New Testament. Follow Paul’s arguments in favor of this basic Christian teaching. Why do these texts make little sense if you believe that the righteous dead go immediately to heaven at death? How is our understanding of the state of the dead vindicated by these texts? What makes the promise of the Resurrection so crucial to us as Seventh-day Adventists with our view of the state of the dead?
- 2 Think about this question, and then bring your answer to class: How differently would you live if you believed that at death everything ended forever?
- 3 Go over all the textual evidence you can find that helps affirm the resurrection of Jesus. Bring it to class, and together review the evidence. How compelling is it? How can you put this material together in a way that could be used as a powerful witnessing tool?

## Sanjay's Miracles: Part 1

Sanjay was a musician and played in a band in India. He was a Christian and did not join his fellow musicians when they went drinking or dancing. But something was missing from his life. Sanjay felt bad when his fellow musicians made fun of his Christian faith.

One day he prayed that God would show His power to his friends so they would know that He was the only true God. That evening the band loaded their equipment into a small bus to drive across a mountain pass to their next appointment. They passed the summit and began their descent when the driver suddenly realized that he had no brakes. The bus veered off the road and rolled into the valley far below. No one was killed, but everyone was injured except Sanjay.

Some of the musicians confessed that Sanjay's God had saved him from harm and began calling him "God's man."

Sanjay met an Adventist pastor who urged him to surrender his life totally to God. Sanjay agreed, but even though he felt God wanted him to use his talents to bring people to Christ, still he hesitated to give up the band. Then something happened that changed the course of his life.

One day he climbed an old coconut tree to pick fresh coconuts. He grasped a palm frond to balance himself while he reached for a coconut. However, the palm frond broke loose, throwing Sanjay off balance. He fell from the tall tree into a field of cut sugar cane. The stalks that remained in the field had been cut at an angle and were as sharp as needles. "Lord, save me!" Sanjay cried as he fell.

His brother heard Sanjay's cry and watched in horror as his brother fell into the sharp stalks. He raced to his side, expecting to find his brother dead, but Sanjay was unhurt. He picked himself up and dusted himself off. Sanjay realized that God had saved his life a second time. "OK, Lord," he said, "I'm Yours. Give me something to do for You."

He asked the Adventist pastor for work, and the pastor invited him to come and train to become a lay evangelist. Sanjay agreed. But how could he lead others to Christ? He had no experience with any work but music.

(continued next week)

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SANJAY GHATGE is a lay evangelist working in remote villages in Maharashtra, India.

# The Efficacy of His Priestly Ministry



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 25:8; Matt. 27:50, 51; Acts 7:54–56; Heb. 6:19, 20; 7:23–28; 8:1, 2; 9.*

**Memory Text:** “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (*Hebrews 8:1, NKJV*).

Not long after the Creation . . . our first parents fell into sin. . . . In the wake of this terrible crisis, God's first concern was for human restoration and the eternal security of the universe. The death of a member of the Godhead—a contingency already determined in the foreknowledge and council of God (*see Rev. 13:8*)—was the only means to that end.

“To secure human participation and cooperation in this supreme endeavor, God moved quickly to inform our first parents of the plan. At the same time, He put in place a teaching device to keep it perpetually before their attention and that of succeeding generations.”—Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1993), pp. 17, 18. That teaching device, of course, was the sanctuary service.

The sanctuary became the center of Hebrew worship, and through its activities and ceremonies it pointed suppliants to the cosmic realities of human salvation in a coming Messiah (*see Hebrews 9*) and to the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary. This week we will look at that heavenly sanctuary and Christ's ministry there.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 21.*

## Pointers From the Ancient Tabernacle

(Exod. 25:9, 40)

Moses was told to build the tabernacle according to the pattern God had shown him on Mount Sinai (Exod. 25:9, 40). And while common sense would lead us away from the conclusion that every board and nail of the tabernacle (and later the temple) had theological significance, we should, nevertheless, take with all seriousness the teaching function of the Old Testament sanctuary system. Even so, we are not given a great deal of information on the meaning of the symbolisms; in fact, in most cases, none at all. Yet piecing together the little we find in the Old Testament with what we have in the New Testament, we are able to arrive at a fairly good understanding of the overall meaning of certain fundamental aspects of the ancient-sanctuary system and service that point beyond themselves to a greater reality. Consider the following:

1. **The morning and evening sacrifice** (Exod. 29:38–42, Num. 28:1–6)
2. **The shewbread and candlesticks** (Exod. 25:23, 30, 31, 37)
3. **The Day of Atonement ceremonies** (Leviticus 16, Heb. 9:1–12)
4. **The high-priestly garments** (Exod. 28:6–21)

The morning and evening sacrifices symbolized “the daily consecration of the nation to Jehovah, and their constant dependence upon the atoning blood of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 352. Many allusions to bread in the New Testament seem to suggest that the bread in the tabernacle/sanctuary pointed forward to Christ (see, for example, Matt. 26:26, John 6:48–51). “Both the manna and the shewbread pointed to Christ, the living Bread, who is ever in the presence of God for us.”—Page 354. Similarly, the candlesticks seem to point to Him who said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). “Those semiprecious gems of the [high priest’s] breastplate . . . bore the names of the tribes of Israel, suggesting, says Ellen G. White . . . that as Christ our Great High Priest pleads His blood before the Father, He bears upon His heart the name of every repentant, believing soul.”—Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary*, p. 38. Compare it to *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 351.

**Review, to the best of your understanding, the earthly sanctuary service. How does it help you understand the plan of salvation?**

## All Pointers Led to Him

**Read** John 1:29. What is the significance of John calling Jesus the “Lamb of God”?

The wilderness tabernacle stood at the center of Israelite worship for hundreds of years. And as long as Israel remained faithful to God, they looked upon this sacred edifice as the place of salvation, the place of atonement between God and His people. The supernatural manifestations that accompanied the dedication of the structure (*see Exod. 40:34, 35*) had riveted such impressions deep into the psyche of those who witnessed them.

The signal demonstration of God’s attendance at the temple’s dedication gave no hint, however, of the structure’s turbulent future. Completely destroyed by the Babylonian army, it later was rebuilt, though not up to the standard of its previous splendor. This, however, was the temple Jesus knew, the one that felt His footsteps. And as Jesus died upon a cross outside Jerusalem one Friday afternoon two thousand years ago, it was in the inner sanctum of this very temple that the curtain mysteriously ripped in two, from top to bottom (*Matt. 27:51*).

“It was the hour of the evening sacrifice. The lamb representing Christ had been brought to be slain.” But the earth shakes, and “with a rending noise the inner veil of the temple is torn from top to bottom by an unseen hand, throwing open to the gaze of the multitude a place once filled with the presence of God.” In one fell swoop, this place where “the Shekinah had dwelt,” and where “God had manifested His glory above the mercy seat,” is now open to public view! “The most holy place of the earthly sanctuary is no longer sacred.” Then in dramatic fashion, she brings the message home: “All is terror and confusion. The priest is about to slay the victim; but the knife drops from his nerveless hand, and the lamb escapes. Type has met antitype in the death of God’s Son. The great sacrifice has been made. . . . It was as if a living voice had spoken to the worshipers: There is now an end to all sacrifices and offerings for sin. The Son of God is come according to His word.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 756, 757.

**Many Christians today are looking toward the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem as a sign of the end. Even if such a temple were rebuilt, and sacrifices were resumed, why would those sacrifices have no efficacy in dealing with the sin problem?**



## Our High Priest *(Heb. 7:25)*

The apostle had been saying a host of things in the first chapters of Hebrews about angels and their status, about Moses and his wilderness experience, about Joshua and the land of Canaan, about the prophets and Abraham and Melchizedek. But as he reaches chapter 8, verse 1, he abruptly calls us back to focus:

**Read Hebrews 8:1, 2. What is the main point of all that the apostle was saying up to these verses?**

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Within the physical layout of the ancient Israelite camp, the ordinary Israelite worshiper stood several barriers removed from the sanctuary's innermost sanctum. To gain physical access, it would have been necessary to get by the buffer of priests and Levites and no-go areas surrounding the sacred enclosure. But now, says the author of Hebrews, Christ, our heavenly Priest-Mediator, has opened a door of unlimited access to the heavenly sanctuary itself, the throne room of the living God. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence," says the sacred writer, "so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (*Heb. 4:16, NIV*). Jesus is our Intercessor in heaven.

Though we do not know the exact form of Jesus' intercession for us, Scripture offers examples of the idea, albeit from a human standpoint. Two of these occurred in the life of Moses, in connection with the rebellion at Kadesh (*Num. 14:10–20*), and in connection with the golden calf affair (*Exod. 32:9–14, 30–32*). These are powerful passages. "But now," Moses pled with God in that last reference, "please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written" (*vs. 32, NIV*). We also witness such forms of priestly intercession in Daniel (*Daniel 9*) and in Jesus' great prayer before His passion (*John 17*).

**Examine the following key passages from Hebrews as examples of what our heavenly High Priest does for us: *Heb. 2:18, 7:25, 8:3–10, 9:11–14, 10:11–17*. Most important, ask yourself, How can I personally benefit in my walk with the Lord by knowing that Jesus is doing these things for me? How can I apply these promises in my life?**

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## The Difference It Makes: Part 1

**Read** Hebrews 4:16. What promise is there for us? What are we admonished to do? What hopes does this offer us? How can you apply what is here to your own life?

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Do those who know Jesus as Savior and High Priest have a spiritual advantage over others who know Him only as Savior? We will deal with the question in two lessons, but perhaps we can begin by noting the contribution of Hebrews 9 to the issue, in general.

There are, of course, several ways to read the chapter. One is to take a strictly exegetical and linguistic approach to it, defining the meaning of words and phrases, and squeezing out the significance of the verses from a purely academic point of view. But another way, equally valid, essentially bypasses all that. Without ignoring the results of the first approach, it simply reads the chapter and observes what it says. When we do that, here is what we find, as it relates to the basic question before us:

1. What happened under the first covenant (the Old Testament sanctuary services) was provisional only. Fundamentally inadequate to bring about internal change, the offerings and ceremonies pointed beyond themselves to something bigger.

2. That bigger something now has happened. Christ has come. He is the real High Priest (*Heb. 9:11*). His entrance into the heavenly sanctuary was not through “the blood of goats and calves; but . . . once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” (*vs. 12, NIV*).

3. The offerings under the old system achieved external results (*vs. 13*) but could not effect internal change. But the blood of Christ reaches to our inner being, cleansing “our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (*vs. 14, NIV*).

4. Christ shed His blood once, on our behalf; and now He appears for us in the presence of God as our High Priest (*vs. 24–28*).

**Read over Hebrews 9. What is the essential message it is giving us? What promises are found in there that you especially find encouraging for yourself?**

## The Difference It Makes: Part 2

The knowledge and acceptance of Jesus as our High Priest should make us kind and generous and patient, the same traits He has manifested toward us. It should make us merciful and gracious, in the same way He has shown mercy and grace toward us. And it should make us morally upright and everlastingly grateful for the profound sacrifice made on our behalf. But any Adventist who has interacted with Christians of other persuasions would readily admit that they have found them equally gracious and merciful and patient and generous and kind and morally upright. So, then, what real difference does “our message of the sanctuary” make?

It probably has something to do with loyalty and faithfulness. When the author of Hebrews wanted to reestablish the recipients of his book in the faith, he turned to the sanctuary theme.

**Read** Hebrews 10:19–25. What is the practical message given to us here, a message that should influence how we live our lives and how we relate to others?

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The book of Hebrews invites us to approach “the throne of grace” (*Heb. 4:16*). The implications here are multifaceted, but one of them gets to the question before us just now. The way has been made for us, through Jesus, to approach God in the heavenly sanctuary. And to follow Jesus by faith into the sanctuary is not only to have one’s soul cleansed by His marvelous grace but also to experience a new appreciation for His immutable law (*see Heb. 8:10*). This transaction, utterly significant in the context of what Adventists call “the great controversy between good and evil,” defines the difference the sanctuary teaching makes for us. By faith we enter with full assurance into that sacred place where Jesus ministers. And there, against all possible odds, we cling to the One whose indelible promise is symbolized by the ark of the covenant, the throne of the living God Himself, founded on justice and mercy. Thus anchored, we do not drift—not into a view of the law that leads to the abandonment of God’s holy Sabbath, and not into evolutionary conceptions of origins that seek to dethrone the living God from His own universe. The doctrine of the sanctuary thus becomes a protection for us against rebellion and secures for God a faithful remnant in a revolted world.

**Further study:** Read Ellen G. White, “In the Holy of Holies,” pp. 423–426, in *The Great Controversy*; “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 350–358, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God’s hand had directed the great Advent Movement, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 423.

“I . . . see the heavenly sanctuary as the dwelling place of God, the seat of His government, the nerve center of the universe. As such, it has always existed. But with the fall of humanity it assumed an added function, namely, the solution of the cosmic rebellion and the security of the universe. It is in this sense that we picture it when we think of the ancient sacrificial system. We see it through a glass colored by the ministry for the eradication of sin.”—Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary*, p. 71.

“I do not visualize an empty heavenly sanctuary. The throne of God, in whatever form, is there, surrounded by multitudes of angels. Best of all—from our standpoint, at least—our All-sufficient High Priest, Jesus Christ Himself, is there! He fills it full! He stands before the throne of God for us! And that’s enough for me!”—Page 71.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How does our understanding of the pre-Advent judgment fit in with our understanding of Christ as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary? Why should the judgment be part-and-parcel of our sanctuary message? Most important, how can we teach the judgment as part of the good news of Jesus as our Substitute in judgment?
- ❷ What does the reality of Christ’s high-priestly ministry mean to you personally? What experience(s) can you share about how this teaching has benefited you spiritually?
- ❸ Go back over the week’s lesson and make a list of all the benefits we derive from Christ as our High Priest. Bring them to class and discuss the implication of these benefits and how they should impact our lives as individuals and as a church community. How can we better take advantage of these promises in order to further our witness and mission to the world?

## Sanjay's Miracles: Part 2

Sanjay realized that God had miraculously saved his life twice, and now he dedicated himself to work for God. He became a lay evangelist and was sent to a village where no one had even heard of Adventists before.

Sanjay found a family who let him stay in the room in which the family kept their idols. Sanjay prayed that his host family would be blessed by his presence and would not force him to leave when they learned that he was Christian.

Sanjay learned that his host had a health problem. He asked to pray to his God for the man's healing. The man agreed, and the homeowner was healed. Sanjay told the man that he was a Christian and invited him to study the Bible. The man invited his family to study with him, and within a few months the entire family gave their hearts to Jesus and offered their home for small group meetings.

Sanjay visited people, prayed for their needs, and urged them to trust in the living God, who hears and answers prayer. When one family mocked him, saying that their god protected and blessed them, Sanjay left feeling that he had failed. The next day the homeowner told Sanjay that after the family had gone to bed the night before, a rat had entered their home and knocked over the oil lamp, which caught the straw walls on fire. The family barely got out alive. "We were wrong about your God. Please, may we attend your prayer meetings?"

Another woman, Ompatti, was troubled by evil spirits. Her husband abandoned her and their three children. Doctors couldn't cure the woman, and trips to religious shrines brought her no relief. Then someone asked Sanjay to pray for her. As he prayed, Sanjay touched the woman, and she fell to the ground screaming. The devils left her. She told everyone of her healing. When her husband learned that she was no longer possessed, he returned. But he objected to Christianity and refused to have anything to do with them. Soon after, he became possessed by demons. Church members continue to pray for him.

In the three years that Sanjay has worked as a lay evangelist, some 200 people in seven villages have given their lives to Christ and been baptized. Some of the groups of believers, which number from 15 to 25 people, have no place to worship. No one's home is large enough to accommodate them. They need churches if these congregations are to continue growing.

Sanjay continues to use music and prayer to lead people to Jesus. Your mission offerings help make Sanjay's work and the work of Global Mission pioneers around the world possible.

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*SANJAY GHATGE is a lay evangelist working in remote villages in Maharashtra, India.*

# His Return *as King and Friend*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Dan. 9:24–27, Matthew 24, Luke 21:25–31, John 14:1–3, 1 Thess. 4:13–18, Heb. 9:28.*

**Memory Text:** “So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (*Hebrews 9:28, RSV*).

Though a distortion of the truth regarding the Second Coming, the *Left Behind* series of books and movies grabbed the attention of millions worldwide. The whole episode presented God as wickedly capricious, and it fostered a climate of irrational fear (if not panic) in people's minds about the Advent, a mood opposite to the way the Bible wants us to think about Christ's return. In the New Testament, generally, the return of Jesus is a glorious, supremely joyful event. He is our King, and also our Friend.

Though unpleasant elements are associated with the Second Coming (as we will see), it is not the fear factor that will cause people to turn their eyes toward heaven. Fear is important, and we do not proclaim the whole truth about the Advent without including it. But in doing so, we ought to stick with what the Scriptures explicitly say and not present anxiety-provoking nightmares of our own making. To give the various aspects of the Advent the same emphasis they receive in Scripture is to create in the hearts of those who care to listen something akin to the anticipation of children yearning for Christmas.

The message of the Second Coming should be good news, not something that sends people looking for anxiety therapy.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 28.*

## Waiting in the Outer Court *(Heb. 9:28)*

The period in which we are now living was foreshadowed by the Day of Atonement in ancient Israel. As the high priest performed his once-a-year ministry in the Most Holy Place, the people, with bated breath, waited in the outer court for his emergence. That emergence would signal the successful completion of His work on their behalf, the eradication of sin from the nation and from the individual.

Since 1844, Christ has been engaged in a phase of ministry prefigured by the Day of Atonement in Israel. When that work is done, He will emerge from the heavenly sanctuary to receive His people. In the words of Hebrews 9:28, “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (*RSV*).

**How** do the following texts relate to the idea of expectant waiting?

*Luke 12:40–48*

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*Titus 2:11–13*

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*1 Pet. 1:3–8*

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William Miller and his followers ardently expected the emergence of the heavenly High Priest in 1844. We know they were disappointed, but try to imagine the passion that moved them. Here were people who loved Jesus with all they had. They felt close to Him; they yearned to see Him. He was their friend. And the sentiments expressed years later by Hiram Edson fairly represent how the whole group felt. They had “confidently expected to see Jesus Christ and all the holy angels with Him,” Edson wrote. When that did not happen, “such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. . . . We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.”—Hiram Edson, manuscript fragment, Center for Adventist Research (from Heritage Room), James White Library, Andrews University. These believers did not breathe a sigh of relief that Jesus did not come. Instead, they were disappointed, and bitterly so.

**Are you excited about the Second Coming? Do you want it soon? Or are you fearful? Do you dread it? What are the reasons for your answers? Write them down and then prayerfully examine what they might be saying about your Christian experience.**

## Addressing the Fear Factor

There is a dark side to the coming of Jesus. Jesus Himself said it will be a time of distress for the nations: “‘At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn’” (*Matt. 24:30, NIV*). He compares the event to the judgments of the Flood and of Sodom (*Matt. 24:37–39; compare Luke 17:26–30*); He speaks of the phenomenon of final separation, using the illustration of two women grinding at the mill, with one taken, the other left (*Matt. 24:40, 41*). And when He speaks of remaining watchful, His warning could not be stronger (*see vs. 43–51*). Peter, one of those present the day Jesus spoke about His coming in Matthew 24, refers to “the day of the Lord” as one of fire and terror (*2 Pet. 3:10–12*). When John sees the event in vision, he says that “all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him” (*Rev. 1:7, NIV*); and Revelation 6:15, 16 portrays people from every walk of life at the Advent appealing to the rocks and mountains to fall on them and “hide [them] from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!” (*NIV*).

### **What** do the following texts say about the Second Coming?

*Matt. 25:31–33, 41*

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*2 Thess. 1:6–9*

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*Heb. 12:25–29*

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There are those who torture and abuse others, those who murder and exploit, who plunder and pillage, and who rob the coffers of their governments, leaving millions to suffer in degradation and poverty. And then there are the good people who arrogantly turn their backs on God and His gracious offer of mercy and pardon. It would be the height of irresponsibility to give them the impression that the Second Coming holds anything for them but bad news, unless they change. With people’s eternal destiny hanging on these issues, it would be criminal on our part to sugarcoat the reality of the situation.

**In what ways might a little fear do us all some good (*Phil. 2:12*)? Maybe some of us need a little more fear than others . . .**



## On the Other Hand. . . .

As we saw in yesterday's lesson, there is a dark side to the coming of Jesus. But for the converted Christian, the scene is always bright; for not only is the Coming One their King, He also is their Friend. This joyous sense of anticipation is encouraged by Jesus Himself, whatever the omen over the horizon. " 'When these things begin to take place,' " He said, " 'stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near' " (*Luke 21:28, NIV*). No heads-down, drop-shoulder posture here. Jesus wants His followers to be hopeful, buoyant, radiant, in anticipation of the climactic day, to set their gaze toward the skies in wistful yearning for that glorious hour of His return.

**Read** the following passages, and see how they strengthen this notion of expectation and joy.

*John 14:1–3*

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*Acts 1:11*

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*Phil. 3:20, 21*

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*1 Thess. 4:13–18*

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*Rev. 7:9, 10, 13–17*

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It is instructive to notice that when Jesus is speaking to the pompous religious leaders (or when He has the rejecters of His grace in mind), He emphasizes the majesty, the kingliness, the judgment aspects of His coming. But when His followers come into focus, the emphasis switches to ideas of comfort, assurance, joy. Thus in Matthew 24:31, immediately after talking about the mourning of the nations at His coming, the tone changes as He comes to focus on His people: The angels gather them, He says, from every nation into His kingdom. And in John 14:1–3, His promise to return is given to calm the "troubled" hearts of His followers, to steady their fraying nerves, to anchor them in hope.

**If you believed, with all your heart, that Jesus was coming within the month, what moral changes would you feel inclined to make in your own life? After you think about your answer, then ask yourself, *Why wait until then to make those changes?* After all, might it be a little harder to make those changes than you think?**

## When Will We See Jesus?: Part 1

Matthew 24 is a pivotal chapter on the second coming of Jesus, recording Jesus' own response to questions raised by His disciples, questions we still have today about when the Advent will occur. Jesus emphasized several points, among them the following:

- 1. We should not be alarmed. (In the Greek, the statement is terse; we might even say, emphatic: “see to it that you are not alarmed’ ” (vs. 6, *NIV*)—whether by famine, by earthquake, or by conflict between nations (vss. 6–8).**
- 2. We will face conflict and hatred, even within the church (vss. 9–13).**
- 3. We should not be naive and gullible as we wait for the Second Coming (vss. 4, 5, 23–26). (Jesus lingered on this point!)**
- 4. The gospel will be preached in the whole world before the end (vs. 14).**
- 5. The event will be a spectacular, visible, worldwide phenomenon (vs. 27).**
- 6. Certain cosmic signs will signal the Advent's approach (vs. 29).**
- 7. As the end arrives, angels will gather together the faithful from all over the globe (vs. 31).**
- 8. The day and hour of the Advent is known only to God (vs. 36).**
- 9. Notwithstanding all warnings or predictions, the Second Coming will be sudden and unexpected (vss. 42–44).**

One important point worth emphasizing from the above list has to do with the gospel. It says that the gospel will be preached everywhere “as a testimony’ ” to all, “and then the end will come’ ” (vs. 14, *NIV*). This suggests that Christ's followers play a role, however indirectly, in creating a condition vital for the termination of human history. It thus calls for increased fervor on the part of each of us to advance God's kingdom where we are.

Leighton Ford tells about a prison chaplain trying to bring a condemned prisoner to Christ in a London jail. “Do you really believe what you say, Chaplain? . . . If I believed your Gospel were true, I would crawl across England on broken glass to tell men about it.” —*The Christian Persuader* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 29. That is the kind of enthusiasm needed now.

**If the gospel must go everywhere before Christ returns, and if we are called to preach that gospel, then we ourselves have a role in working with Him to hasten the Second Advent, do we not? Yes or no? What are the challenges, opportunities, or problems this idea presents to us?**

## When Will We See Jesus?: Part 2

Sunday's lesson referred to the Millerites and how they eagerly waited (albeit in vain) for the Advent on October 22, 1844. What they, and we since, have discovered is that Jesus was not coming back the next day, either, nor the next week, the next month, the next year, the next decade, or the next century! And here we are today, some 164 years later, still in this world. How do we grapple with this problem in our own minds?

One way is to focus on the veracity and certainty of the event. In other words, regardless of the when of the event, we can come to grips with the fact of it, not by logic, but by considering who made the promise in the first place. It came from Jesus Himself, an authentic, historical figure, whose probity and credibility have stood the test of the centuries. We see this very Person addressing a group of followers, worried and apprehensive about His impending departure. Do not be troubled, He says to them. Trust Me (*John 14:1*). “‘If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me’” (*vs. 3, NIV*).

**Review** the following passages. How do they help put the issue before us in perspective? (*Gen. 3:15, Isa. 40:8, Gal. 4:4; see also Dan. 9:24–27*).

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The promise of the First Advent was given way back in the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 3:15*); and the world was to wait thousands of years for its fulfillment. But as God's great cosmic clock struck the divinely prescribed hour, mystic beings announced to startled shepherds on a hillside in Bethlehem: “‘Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you’” (*Luke 2:11, NIV*). The promise did not fail; for it was anchored on the unshakable Word of the living God. And so it will be with the second coming of Jesus.

**What good was Christ's first coming if we do not have the assurance of the Second Coming? How should the certainty of the First Coming, and what Christ did for us at it, make us absolutely certain about the reality of the Second Coming, regardless of whenever it happens?**

**Further Study:** “Christ had ascended to heaven in the form of humanity. The disciples had beheld the cloud receive Him. The same Jesus who had walked and talked and prayed with them; who had broken bread with them; who had been with them in their boats on the lake; and who had that very day toiled with them up the ascent of Olivet,—the same Jesus had now gone to share His Father’s throne. And the angels had assured them that the very One whom they had seen go up into heaven, would come again even as He had ascended. . . . Well might the disciples rejoice in the hope of their Lord’s return.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 832.

Our concept of time has a lot to do with the level of anxiety we experience in respect to the so-called delay of the Advent. In Western society in particular, our expectation of temporal precision affects our thinking about the event. To be told that an event will happen soon has a certain currency with us, and we expect it to take place shortly, in the Western sense. For the Eastern mind, on the other hand—the context in which the biblical writers operated—the more important aspect of an event was its certainty; time was secondary.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ From about the mid-eighteenth century up through World War I, many people in the West thought that through science, reason, and technology, humanity could greatly improve itself, and that evils such as war, disease, and other calamities could be eradicated or at least greatly limited. Contrast that view with the view of the world presented by Jesus more than nineteen hundred years ago, in Matthew 24. Who was right? How should Matthew 24 be a factor in helping us have faith in the promises of Christ’s second coming, especially when contrasted with these other views of what the future would be like?
- ❷ There is a subtle danger in the fact that the idea of the Second Coming has become part of our regular Adventist vocabulary. This can prevent us from fully appreciating (and thus adequately conveying to others) the extraordinary, mind-boggling nature of this event. How can we protect ourselves from becoming hardened to this extraordinary event, upon which all our hopes rest?
- ❸ Look at your local church, and then ask this question: Are we helping hasten the Second Coming of Jesus, or are we part of the reason for the delay? Discuss the implications of this question and your answers to it in class.

## Seeking the Lost

by FERNANDO CUNHA DIAS

I had always wanted to be a missionary, so I studied for the ministry. But God had a mission field far closer than I could have dreamed.

I was assigned to work with a pastor in his three churches in a region of Brazil where people are closely bound to their traditional religion. It was difficult to get people to even listen to God's message here.

Then someone told me that a woman named Vera lived in a camp of poor people not far from a town in the district. I set out to find this woman. The camp was located in a beautiful valley four miles up a steep mountainside. When I arrived, I found 70 families living in simple dwellings made from bamboo and covered with black plastic tarps.

I stopped at several bamboo homes asking for Vera, but no one knew her. Then I met a young man working outside his little hut. I asked the man whether he knew anyone who was a Seventh-day Adventist.

"Are you a pastor?" the young man asked. When I told him I was, he responded, "Praise God! I have prayed for a long time for a pastor." Then he introduced me to several people who had been Seventh-day Adventists, but who had not attended church for a long time. I arranged to return and visit each of them to study the Bible and minister to them.

The next time I visited the camp, I brought some church members with me. We built a little chapel from bamboo and covered the roof with a tarp. It was not very comfortable, but the people did not mind; they were eager to hear the Word of God.

Interest in Bible studies continued to grow, and evangelistic meetings were arranged. The district pastor led out, and several members of nearby Adventist churches lent their support to the meetings. Attendance grew until we had to build more pews to accommodate the people. Eventually some 200 people attended the nightly meetings.

Ivanette, a teenage girl who attended the meetings, had a recurring dream in which she returned home after the meetings to discover that she had left her sandals at the church. When she returned to the chapel to get her sandals, she heard a voice saying, "This is the true church, the church you should follow."

Following the meetings, 30 new believers were baptized, including Ivanette and her father. The "bamboo church" was organized as a company. Ivanette's father donated land on which to build a permanent church, and the believers are working to build a more permanent church.

Our mission offerings make evangelism such as this possible. Thank you for giving faithfully.

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FERNANDO CUNHA DIAS is a pastor in the *Espírito Santo Conference of Brazil*.

The Bible gives us many inspirational stories of God's agents of hope. In this quarter's study, "Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries," we will focus on some of these outstanding missionaries; on who they were and what they did in seeking to bring others to a saving knowledge of the Lord of salvation.

This quarter is designed to lead us into a renewed commitment to share God's love with our neighbors, friends, and those in mission fields around the world, bringing us to a new dimension in our Christian lives.

## Lesson 1—For Such a Time as This: The Apostle Paul

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Paul's Background (*Acts 22:3–5, 25–29*)

MONDAY: Paul: His Conversion and Calling (*Acts 9:1–19*)

TUESDAY: Paul: A Man of Like Passions (*Rom. 7:19–25, 1 Cor. 9:27*)

WEDNESDAY: Life and Salvation through Christ (*1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 6:14*)

THURSDAY: Themes of Hope (*Rom. 5:15, 6:23, Eph. 2:8*)

**Memory Text**—*Romans 15:17, NIV*

**Sabbath Gem:** The apostle Paul had a powerful impact on his world and radically helped to spread the gospel well beyond Israel. What a model are both his life and ministry to us in our mission to the world.

## Lesson 2—"All Things to All Men": Paul Preaches to the World

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Paul Encouraged for Mission (*Acts 9:24–27*)

MONDAY: All Things to All People (*Acts 9:19–22, 13:14–16*)

TUESDAY: A Witness to the Philosophers (*Acts 17:18–34*)

WEDNESDAY: The Message on Mars' Hill (*Acts 17:28*)

THURSDAY: Paul's Method of Church Planting (*1 Thess. 1:7, 8, NIV*)

**Memory Text**—*1 Corinthians 9:22, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Paul gives us an excellent example of how we need to learn to adapt the way we present our message, depending on the context and culture in which we are giving witness to the gospel.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.