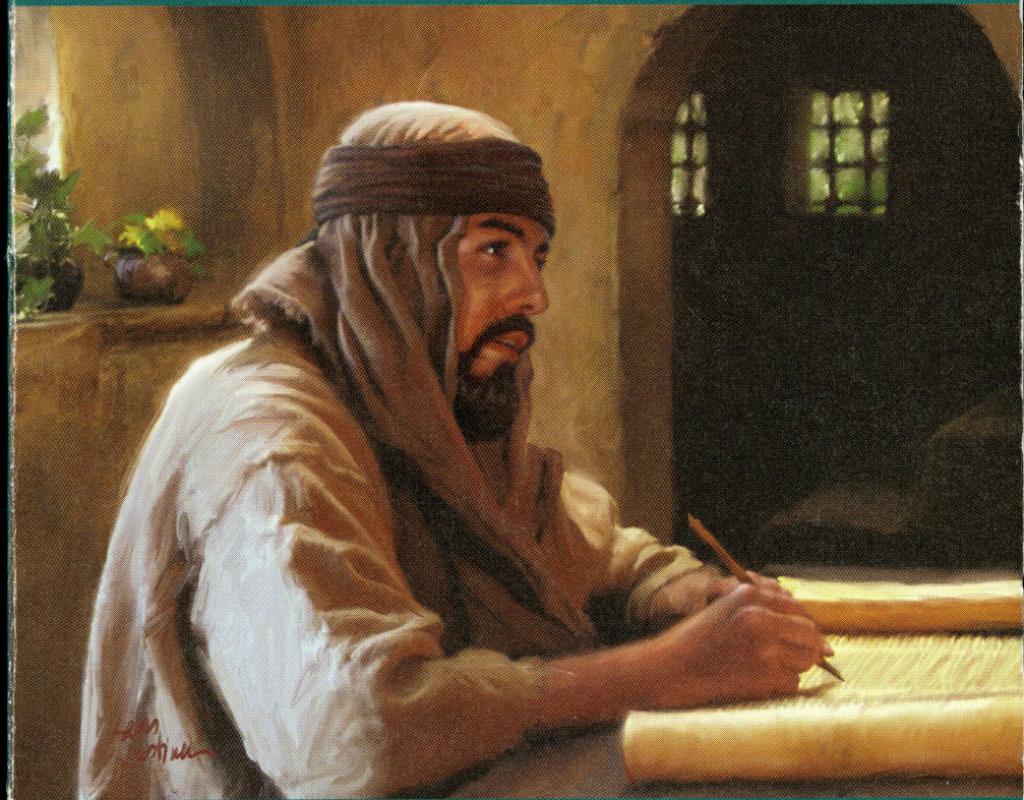


ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
April • May • June 2005

Jesus Through the Eyes of Mark



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH



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Editorial Office 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904

Principal Contributor
William Johnsson

Editor
Clifford R. Goldstein

Associate Editor
Lyndelle Brower Chiomenti

Publication Manager
Soroya Homayouni Parish

Editorial Assistant
Larie S. Gray

Pacific Press® Coordinator
Paul A. Hey

Art Director and Illustrator
Lars Justinen

Concept Design
Dever Design

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Jesus Through *the Eyes of Mark*

We are about to embark on a journey that will take us to the Holy Land, to Galilee in particular. With John Mark as our guide, we will retrace the steps of the greatest Man who ever lived, Jesus Christ.

So marvelous was this life that no one account can do justice to it. In the Bible we find four Gospels, but even they, combined, cannot encompass everything about Jesus. Thus, John the beloved closes his record with the observation: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (*John 21:25, NIV*). That’s an incredible amount of books, but Jesus did an incredible amount of deeds.

Each of the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—was written at different times and, at first, circulated separately. Many scholars think that Mark’s was written first, and while that’s possible, it cannot be established with certainty.

What matters is that each of the Gospels was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and each bears a united witness to Jesus Christ and what He did for the world.

Because each Gospel writer retained his individuality as he wrote, we see differences of perspective and emphasis. This is as the Lord wanted it; and, indeed, this is how the Holy Spirit works. Far from calling into question the divine inspiration of the Gospels, this variety of perspective helps to affirm it. It’s God’s way of seeking to touch lives. He wants to reach us all, who are so different, and He uses different voices to do it.

“There is variety in a tree,” wrote Ellen White, “there are scarcely two leaves just alike. Yet this variety adds to the perfection of the tree as a whole.

“In our Bible, we might ask, Why need Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Gospels, why need the Acts of the Apostles, and the variety of writers in the Epistles, go over the same thing?

“The Lord gave His word in just the way He wanted it to come. He gave it through different writers, each having his own individu-

ality, though going over the same history.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21.

John Mark’s Gospel is the shortest of the four accounts. Whereas Matthew portrays Jesus as a great teacher, Luke highlights His concerns for those on the fringes of society, and John focuses on His conversations one-on-one with a variety of people, Mark shows Him as a Man of action. Through Mark’s eyes, we see Jesus as a Man with a mission, one that He will accomplish.

Mark’s Gospel has a simple organization:

- A. Prologue (1:1-13)
- B. Ministry in Galilee (1:14-8:26)
- C. The Passion Looms (8:27-10:52)
- D. Final Ministry in Jerusalem (11:1-13:37)
- E. The Passion and Resurrection (14:1-16:20)

And yet, we shouldn’t be fooled by the simplicity, for just as Jesus, told “simple” stories with profound implications, Mark does the same. His account is filled with powerful insights that give birth to life-changing revelations about God.

So join Mark as he takes us where Jesus walked. We will follow his account in order, and like the disciples of old, may we walk with Jesus throughout this quarter.

And though the Gospel itself was written by John Mark, our lessons come from another disciple of Jesus, a modern-day disciple, one whose words have, over the years, brought encouragement, hope, and promise to the church: Dr. William Johnsson, editor of the *Adventist Review*. A prolific writer and a well-known New Testament scholar, Dr. Johnsson takes us through the book of Mark, giving us his own spirit-inspired insights, as well. Thus, we see Jesus through the eyes of Mark, who comes to us this quarter through the eyes of Bill.

Trustworthy views, to be sure.

Mark shows Jesus a Man of action, a Man with a mission, one that He will accomplish.

Got Questions?

Sabbath School University *has answers!*

Sabbath School University is a 28-minute discussion of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*. SSU discusses the lesson content and strategies to enrich your Sabbath School with fellowship, outreach, Bible study, and missions. Sabbath School leaders, don't miss this weekly broadcast on the Adventist Television Network.



<http://Adventist.TV>
broadcast and program information



To the Jews first...

—Romans 1:16

The work among the Jews in North America is developing into an active ministry.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help the Jewish Evangelism Training Center in Miami, Florida to train people in the best methods to reach Jewish people with the gospel.

MISSION

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on June 25 supports projects in the North American Division.

Introducing Jesus, *the Son of God*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

FOUR ACCOUNTS, ONE LORD. Each of the four Gospel writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has a particular emphasis on the life and ministry of Jesus. Each begins his Gospel in a manner that hints at the portrait he will develop. Matthew's first words are: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). That is, Jesus is not only Jewish but He is of the royal line. Matthew pitches his Gospel especially to Jewish readers as he shows that Jesus was Israel's true King. Luke, on the other hand, addresses his account to "most excellent Theophilus" (1:1-4). He has Gentile readers in view and uses an introduction that they will be familiar with. John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). Throughout his Gospel we are conscious that Jesus is the Word made flesh, "full of grace and truth" (1:14).

This week we'll take a look at Mark's inspired opening and the special emphasis he conveyed.

The Week at a Glance: What does Mark's opening of his account of Christ's life suggest from the outset? What kind of start did Mark have in ministry? What did he mean by the term *gospel*? Why the emphasis on Jesus as "the Son of God"?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 1:1-20.*

Memory Text: "A voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased'" (*Mark 1:11, RSV*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 2.*

The Writer, John Mark

The Gospel we are studying this quarter does not mention the name of the writer, but it was early attributed to Mark, and rightly so. Mark was not a prominent person in the early church; thus, it would be highly unlikely for him to be dubbed the author unless he really was. That's one of the great things about what our God can do: He can take even the lowliest of people and place them in positions of great prominence and influence (*see Genesis 40, 41*).

Mark, though, didn't actually have the greatest start in ministry. In fact, early on he proved himself unworthy of the high calling that this work involved.

Read Acts 15:36-40. Why was Paul so determined not to allow Mark to come with them?

"It was here that Mark, overwhelmed with fear and discouragement, wavered for a time in his purpose to give himself wholeheartedly to the Lord's work. Unused to hardships, he was disheartened by the perils and privations of the way. He had labored with success under favorable circumstances; but now, amidst the opposition and perils that so often beset the pioneer worker, he failed to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross. He had yet to learn to face danger and persecution and adversity with a brave heart. As the apostles advanced, and still greater difficulties were apprehended, Mark was intimidated and, losing all courage, refused to go farther and returned to Jerusalem."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 169, 170.

How did Paul's attitude toward Mark later change? 2 Tim. 4:11, Philemon 24.

What an incredible change on the part of Paul toward Mark. Do you think that Paul simply became more tolerant of someone who abandoned him; or, perhaps, was it more likely that Mark had indeed changed into someone whom Paul could now trust?

Look back in your own life to where you utterly blew it yet were given an opportunity to redeem yourself. How much did that new opportunity mean to you? How does that reflect, in a small way, the great principles of grace and forgiveness that God gives to us? Maybe there's someone whom you need to do the same for now, as well?

The Gospel Begins (*Mark 1:1*).

Read Mark 1:1 and contrast it with the openings of the other Gospels. What main difference do you see?

Mark's beginning seems abrupt. He passes over Jesus' genealogy, His miraculous conception, and His dramatic birth. He gives not a hint of the visit of the Magi, the revelation to the shepherds, or King Herod's diabolical plot to kill the Baby. We hear nothing about Jesus' flight to Egypt or His early years as a carpenter in Nazareth. It isn't that these facts are unimportant—they are important. But for Mark, and for us, they aren't most important. What Mark wants the reader to get from the outset is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Study other biblical references to learn what “Son of God” means. Note especially Luke 1:34, 35; John 10:30; Phil.2:5-11; Col.1:13-19; Heb. 1:1-3. What do these texts tell us about who Jesus really is? Why is knowledge about His identity so important to us?

The unique role of the Holy Spirit in Mary's conception shows us that the Man Jesus was also the Son of God. But the term “Son of God” has a much greater meaning: It tells us that He shares the very nature of God—that He is truly God, always has been and always will be. Thus, the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists declare under article 4: “God the Eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. . . . Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ.”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, p. 36.

Mark makes no reference to the virgin birth, most likely because he wants to emphasize the eternal Sonship of Jesus. And he calls this the “gospel,” which is an old Greek term (*euaggelion*) that originally meant “news of victory” in war. For the followers of Jesus, that term no longer meant good news in general but the good news that centers in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He IS the good news, He IS the gospel! Using this idea of the gospel as “news of victory” as the background, what is the victory that you have in your life now because of Jesus? What was won for you? What was defeated? What difference does this victory mean for you now, today?

The Messenger (*Mark 1:2-8*).

Before all the great interventions of God in history, He sends a message to prepare the people. “Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (*Amos 3:7, NIV*). So, before the greatest event this world ever will see, He raised up a messenger, John the Baptist. And, just as Messiah’s coming was foretold in Bible prophecy, the messenger also was predicted. Notice that Mark quotes Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, although he mentions only Isaiah as the source.

What was John the Baptist’s role and message?

Mark 1:2, 3

Mark 1:4

Mark 1:7

John’s mission pointed beyond himself. He was a forerunner, a herald, to proclaim that One far greater than he was about to appear and to get the people ready to meet Him.

The texts emphasize preparing the way. The picture is one of road building. Just as today engineers involved in constructing highways cut through mountains, fill in holes and depressions, and straighten curves, so John was a “road builder” for Jesus, the Son of God (notice how *Isaiah 40:4* elaborates on the highway construction illustration). John carried out his mission in three ways: (1) by announcing that Messiah was about to appear, (2) by calling the people to get ready by turning from their sins, and (3) by baptizing them as a public demonstration that they had heeded the message of the Coming One.

John never sought to draw attention to himself. He seemed devoid of self-seeking; his head was not turned by the crowds that flocked to hear him. This self-effacing messenger could say from the heart: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (*John 3:30*).

We Seventh-day Adventists believe that, like John, God has raised us up to sound a prophetic message about the coming of Jesus. What can we learn from John the Baptist as we seek to be true to our mission? In what way or ways is our task similar to and different from John’s mission? What must you change in your own life to be better suited to take part in this task?

The Commissioning

Compare Mark's account of the Baptist's ministry with the other Gospels (*Matthew 3, Mark 1:4-11, Luke 3:1-22, John 1:6-8, 19-35*). What parallels do you see? What differences? What advantages are there to having different accounts, different perspectives, of the same events? Should they always be expected to agree on every point? If not, why not?

Mark's treatment of John the Baptist is by far the shortest of the four Gospels. Mark is focused on Jesus the Son of God, and he cuts through all the information about John the Baptist to get to Jesus. John's part in the story is twofold: He is the forerunner of the Messiah, and he baptized Jesus. Mark tells us nothing about the circumstances of John's birth, as does Luke; he is saying nothing of the later work of the Baptist, as do Matthew and John. The only other reference to John the Baptist after the brief description of Mark 1:9-13 is a description of John's death, slotted into the ongoing account of Jesus' ministry in Galilee (*Mark 6:14-29*).

Read Mark 1:10, 11. How does this event fit in with the opening line of Mark's account of Jesus? What crucial point is being emphasized?

By the heavenly dove of the Spirit and the Voice from heaven, the Godhead demonstrated to the world that Jesus of Nazareth was not just another human. He was truly human, but He was much more—He was God's Son, truly God. Under divine inspiration, Mark stresses this point, for it's an important one for the Christian faith.

Suppose you believed that Jesus were just a great man, rather than the Son of God Himself. How would that impact your faith, your deeds, your whole Christian life in general? What difference does it make that He is the Son of God?

The Ministry Begins (*Mark 1:14-20*).

What place did Jesus give to the element of time as He began His public ministry? (*Matt. 3:2, 4:17, NIV; compare Mark 1:4, 15*).

The first message of Jesus was identical with John the Baptist's: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (*1:4, 15; compare Matt. 3:2, 4:17*). But Jesus added a new dimension: Whereas John preached that the long-awaited Messiah was about to come, Jesus proclaimed: "The time has come!"

Seventh-day Adventists are much attuned to the importance of time in God's plan. Thus, we see in Jesus' dramatic statement "The time has come!" not only a general reference to the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the Messiah but a specific reference to the time prophecies of Daniel. In his great 70 weeks of years prediction (*Dan. 9:24-27*), the ancient seer foretold the precise time of Messiah's appearance. And, we believe, just as Jesus appeared right on time at His first coming, so He will come again right on God's time. The apostle Paul wrote: "But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son" (*Gal. 4:4, NIV*). That was true at the Incarnation; it will be true again for the glorious Second Advent.

Study the account of the call of the first disciples in *Mark 1:16-20*. Put yourself in the scene by the lake; join Peter, Andrew, James, and John as they cast nets for fish or get ready to fish. Then Jesus walks by and calls, "Come; follow Me!" And without hesitation—"at once"—they drop their nets and follow Him. Why should you find it surprising that they would leave their all so abruptly? How do you account for their apparently spontaneous response? What would it take to get you to do the same thing?

The fishermen who left their nets and boats to follow Jesus were not seeking financial reward. Fishing was hard work, but they knew it well and could maintain their livelihood. But Jesus of Nazareth had neither riches, fame, nor an organized movement. Following Him meant indeed launching out into the deep in ways they had never before experienced. Only one fact can account for their actions, which to others would not have made sense; they saw something in Jesus that touched their souls. Seeing Him, hearing His voice, they were moved to a decision that would change their lives.

If you are a follower of Christ, what have you had to give up for Him? If your answer is "Nothing," what might *2 Corinthians 13:5* say to you?

Further Study: Compare Matthew's and Luke's accounts with the verses in Mark we studied this week: *Matthew 3:1–4:22, Luke 3:1–22, 5:1–11*. Read "Misrepresentations of the Godhead," *Evangelism*, pp. 613–617; "The Baptism" and "The Call by the Sea," *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 109–113, pp. 244–251.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Why could an angel not be our Savior? What if Christ were not eternally God but a “god” created by God—what difference would that make? Think of the marvelous confidence we can have in Jesus, our Savior, Lord, and great High Priest. Discuss in class the implications of the deity of Christ.**
- ② Suppose you were there at the baptism of Jesus; you saw the Spirit descending, you heard the Voice from heaven. What kind of excuses could you make that could cause you to doubt that it really was something from God? How do people, today, do the same thing with evidence for God’s existence, power, and care? In what ways do we, even as believers, have to be careful of falling into the same trap?**
- ③ The disciples had to make some radical changes in their lives in order to follow Jesus. What about us? Have we had to make radical changes, as well? If you haven’t, what might that tell you about your walk with the Lord?**
- ④ Have someone in class explain the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27. Why should every Christian understand this important prophecy?**

Summary: In the first words of his Gospel, Mark introduces Jesus as "Son of God." This expression, which points to Jesus' oneness and equality with God, will underline the entire Gospel of Mark. In the passage that opens this Gospel and that was the focus of our study this week, we immediately found evidences of Jesus' divine Sonship: (1) He came in fulfillment of prophecy, (2) He came right on God's time, and (3) at the baptism that inaugurated His public ministry, the Father declared Him to be "My beloved Son."

Finding Faith in North Korea

John McGhee

There are faithful Christians in North Korea. No one knows just how many, but we know they are there. Here is the story of one of them.

Mrs. Kim* became a Seventh-day Adventist almost 50 years ago. Following the Korean War, she was trapped in North Korea, separated from family and friends.

Recently Mrs. Kim managed to travel from North Korea via the Korean “underground railroad” to China and on to South Korea. Her accomplices created a new identity for her so that she could visit her family in South Korea. While in Seoul she told church leaders about her amazing epic of faith.

She has been isolated from other Adventists, but she has talked with God constantly, daily sensed His presence, and often heard Him communicate with her. For years she kept her precious Bible hidden in a small cupboard, knowing that if the authorities ever caught her with it, she would be tortured and perhaps killed.

One day several years ago, Mrs. Kim felt a strong impression to put her Bible into her son’s backpack. A few minutes later she answered a knock on her door and found two policemen. The men brushed her aside, strode into her kitchen, and walked straight to the cupboard where she normally kept her Bible. She is sure that it was God who had warned her to move her Bible.

She had to find someplace to hide her Bible. That evening she dug a hole near the utility pole near her front door, placed her carefully wrapped Bible into the hole, and covered it with dirt.

Daily Mrs. Kim dug up the Bible and read it. She grew stronger spiritually and physically. Then one afternoon three men, including a guard and two utility workers, knocked on her door. “We need to move the pole in your front yard,” one of them said.

Instantly praying, she heard a voice, Invite them inside for tea! She invited them in, and they accepted. While the men sipped tea and ate crackers, a crack of thunder exploded in the air. Rain began to fall, and the men jumped from their chairs. Hurriedly the men ran to the truck, shouting, “We’ll come back tomorrow!”

The men did return the following day. But by that time, the Bible was safely moved to a new hiding place.

As Mrs. Kim finished her testimony, she said, “Almost all the other Adventists my age are already dead. I don’t know why God has allowed me to live 79 years. The believers I know in North Korea end their prayers with a request to be faithful martyrs when the time comes.”

* Not her real name.

John McGhee is director of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries in the Northern Asia-Pacific Division.

Amazing Miracle Worker



SABBATH AFTERNOON

MAN OF ACTION. After his abbreviated introduction, Mark plunges into Jesus' ministry in Galilee. He presents a series of short, action-packed vignettes, like a fast-paced television report.

Again it is instructive to compare and contrast Mark's approach with the other Gospel writers. In Matthew's Gospel, the first major event emphasized in Jesus' ministry is the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5–7*), but Mark doesn't even mention it. Luke focuses on Jesus' sermon at Nazareth (*Luke 4:14-30*), but Mark bypasses that too. For John, the miracle at the wedding in Cana highlights the opening of Jesus' ministry, but Mark makes no mention of it. Each Gospel writer, inspired by the Holy Spirit, creates an individual account of the life and work of this incredible Man, our Savior and Lord.

The Week at a Glance: What proof did Jesus start giving of His power? In what ways did the healing of Peter's mother-in-law reveal the principles of a Christian life? How did Jesus show the link between the spiritual and the physical life? In what ways did Christ break down some of the longstanding religious traditions of His day?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 1:21–2:17.*

Memory Text: “Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ ” (*Mark 1:41, NIV*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 9.*

The Demon-Possessed Man (*Mark 1:21-28*).

Jesus came at a time when the forces of evil were in the ascendancy, when men and women were held tightly in their grasp. Ellen White paints a graphic picture of the times: "The deception of sin had reached its height. All the agencies for depraving the souls of men had been put in operation. The Son of God, looking upon the world, beheld suffering and misery. With pity He saw how men had become victims of satanic cruelty. . . . The very stamp of demons was impressed upon the countenances of men. Human faces reflected the expression of the legions of evil with which they were possessed."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 36.

In **Mark 1:21-28**, what's the first thing that Jesus did that impressed His audience that He was someone special? At the same time, why wasn't that enough to prove who He really was?

Jesus came as the great Deliverer of humanity. He came, not to be served but to serve; not to be exalted but to bring hope and healing. Thus, we find Him in constant conflict with the forces of evil who fought hard to retain their hold over the human beings they possessed. The demons were strong, but Jesus was stronger.

Read carefully the healing of the demon-possessed man in the synagogue at Capernaum (*Mark 1:21-28*). How should this miracle help prove His identity?

Jesus eventually would be rejected by many of the people He came to deliver because they would refuse to acknowledge who He truly was, *despite the powerful evidence given them*. In contrast, the devils recognized Him and bowed before His authority. Talk about irony!

Christian author C. S. Lewis told how, when he was an atheist, another atheist, talking to him about Jesus, said something to the effect of, Well, you know, C. S., there's a lot of historical information backing up the Gospel accounts of the life and death of Christ. The friend then went on his merry way, seemingly unaffected by the implications of his own statement. The implications, however, profoundly impacted Lewis, who eventually became a Christian. How does this account fit in with today's lesson? In what ways are we, even as Christians, in danger of assuming a similar attitude as Lewis's atheist friend; that is, of ignoring powerful evidence given to us about the working and power of God?

Peter's Mother-in-law (*Mark 1:29-39*).

How does Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law demonstrate His personal interest and care? (*Mark 1:29-34*).

The New International Version translates Mark 1:30, 31 like this: "Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them." As soon as Jesus heard about her sickness, He went to her bedside. No putting off the visit until He had eaten Sabbath lunch, no time given to instructing the disciples. Instead, she came first. And at the bedside He didn't simply speak to make her well: He took her hand and helped her up. What a tender, thoughtful Healer He was! Notice also that the healing was not only immediate but complete. A bout with fever frequently leaves a person weak and debilitated. Not so with Peter's mother-in-law: She got up and immediately ministered to them.

Jesus does something for Peter's mother-in-law that she couldn't do for herself, and then she responds. How does this reflect the whole idea of the Christian life? (*See Matt. 10:8; John 15:12; 1 John 5:2, 3*).

When was the last time someone did something really special for you for which you were exceedingly grateful? How did you respond, and why? How did your response also reflect what the Christian life of grace is all about?

By doing all these wonderful things, Jesus gets a great following. "All men," said the disciples, "seek for Thee." But did they really? When you read the whole story of Jesus, it's possible that some of these same people were among those who, in the end, turned away from Him. Thus, seeking after Jesus, in and of itself, isn't always enough. There needs to be something else. How does the response of Peter's mother-in-law hold the key to solving this potential problem, and how does that apply to our own spiritual life? (*See also James 2:22*.)

The Leper (*Mark 1:40-45*).

Study Jesus' cleansing of the leper in **Mark 1:40-45**. What shows Jesus' compassion? Why did He give the healed man a strong warning? What was the result of this miracle?

The English term *leprosy* comes from the Greek *lepra*, which is used in the New Testament. It seems evident, however, that the word was used for various diseases affecting the skin. The *SDA Bible Dictionary*, in discussing the description of leprosy in Leviticus 13, notes: “An analysis of the various symptoms . . . disclose[s] that the term leprosy was evidently used in a more general sense than it is today. Some have suggested that Leviticus 13 comprehends 7 different diseases under the general term ‘leprosy.’ Some of the symptoms described resemble . . . psoriasis, . . . rather than leprosy, also called Hansen’s disease, although leprosy is certainly included.”—Page 667.

The Old Testament gave explicit instructions for those diagnosed by the priest as having leprosy. They were sent away from home and society (*Num. 5:1-4, 12:9-15*, *2 Kings 15:5*) and forbidden to enter any city (*2 Kings 7:3*). The leper was to wear torn clothes, let his hair hang loose, and cry out “Unclean, unclean!” if anyone approached him (*Lev. 13:45, 46*). Apparently these conventions were still in force at the time of Jesus. The ten men with leprosy who met Jesus outside a certain village stood at a distance and shouted out to Him (*see Luke 17:12*). However, the leper in *Mark 1:40* came right up to Jesus and begged Him on his knees for cleansing.

As humans, we all have a disease worse than leprosy, and that's sin. How, though, did a holy, sinless God respond and treat us anyway?

The fact that Jesus not only permitted the leper to approach Him but reached out His hand and touched him—breaking the conventions of the day—vividly shows the Savior's compassion. We, too, must not underestimate the healing power of touch. Employed with appropriate discretion, the touch of love—whether the outstretched hand or an embrace—for many wounded people goes far beyond what words may accomplish.

And though (in most cases) none of us have the power of supernatural healing in our touch, we should all as Christians have the power of love, of compassion, of mercy and unselfish care for others. What is your attitude toward modern-day “lepers”? What do you need to change about yourself in order to show them the same compassion as did Christ? Why is that so often hard to do?

The Paralytic (*Mark 2:1-12*).

The story of the paralytic lowered through the roof is one of determination and ingenuity. We can't but admire the four men who, finding no way to get to Jesus through a crowded house, made a hole in the roof through which they lowered the man on the mat. The story even has a humorous touch. The teachers of the law, out of their element in the crowded, sweaty room, couldn't believe it when bits of ceiling began to rain down on them and someone was coming in through the roof!

Read *Mark 2:1-12.* Imagine that you are sitting on the floor in the crowded room. You have come out to see this Jesus of Nazareth, whose miracles have people talking. But what happens is more amazing than anything you have heard. Imagine the reaction of the participants to Jesus' words and actions:

The men who lowered the paralytic—their first reactions? Later reactions? The reaction of the paralytic? The reaction of the scribes? The reaction of the people who saw and heard Jesus?

Jesus honored the faith of the men who brought the paralytic, but not in the way they expected. He knew that the paralytic's most pressing burden was spiritual. As much as the sick man wanted to be made physically whole, he sought peace with God even more.

"Like the leper, this paralytic had lost all hope of recovery. His disease was the result of a life of sin, and his sufferings were embittered by remorse. He had long before appealed to the Pharisees and doctors, hoping for relief from mental suffering and physical pain. But they coldly pronounced him incurable, and abandoned Him to the wrath of God. . . .

"Yet it was not physical restoration He desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If he could see Jesus, and receive the assurance of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be content to live or die according to God's will."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 267.

Stress, guilt, fear, loneliness, anger, resentment, and jealousy all can have a debilitating effect on health. What promises do we have through Jesus that, if claimed by faith, could help bring healing both to body and soul? How have you experienced this power?

Levi Matthew (*Mark 2:13-21*).

Levi also is known as Matthew (*see Matt. 10:31*). As a tax collector, he was a member of a despised group. People hated tax collectors for two reasons: (1) They worked on behalf of Rome, a foreign occupying power. The tax collectors were collaborators with the enemy, and (2) tax collectors were often unscrupulous. The Romans followed a system of “tax farming.” Instead of taxing each person directly, they relied on tax agents who were held responsible for bringing into the treasury a stipulated sum. But so long as the tax collector paid in the designated amount, he could raise as much as he was able and keep the remainder for himself. Thus, the system lent itself to abuses. Tax collectors became wealthy by preying on their fellow citizens.

Jesus’ call to Levi Matthew must have shocked many people, including His followers. Further, Jesus went to the dinner that Matthew, in gratitude, put on for Him. Matthew invited his friends—other tax collectors—and “sinners,” meaning ordinary people on whom the Pharisees, who prided themselves in their superior standing with God, looked down upon. Their attitude toward them was: “‘This mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them’” (*John 7:49, NIV*).

Jesus, however, saw every person, no matter how society or the Pharisees regarded them, as a candidate for the kingdom of heaven. “‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick,’” He said. “‘I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners’” (*Mark 2:17, NIV*).

Explain Jesus’ parable of the new cloth and new wine (*Mark 2:21, 22*) in the context of the day’s lesson.

Jesus wasn’t one more in the line of Israel’s prophets. He was a prophet, but much more. He was God in the flesh, bringing the kingdom of heaven. This newness would burst old patterns of religious traditions and conventions of society, such as those that looked down upon certain classes of people, even in violation of the basic principles of true faith. It would eventually burst outside the wineskins of traditional religion itself, as the gospel would go to the Gentiles.

Some longstanding human traditions, by virtue of nothing but their age, can become such a part of a faith that their violation seems sinful. What human traditions (if any) in Adventism have taken on the aura of something divine and inviolable? What’s the danger when this happens? How can we help people discern between what’s divine and what’s only human?

(*See also Mark 7:7.*)

Further Study: Luke covers all the material in this week's lesson and Matthew some of it. Compare their accounts with Mark's: Matthew 8:14-17, Luke 4:31-44, 5:12-38. Read "At Capernaum," "Thou Canst Make Me Clean," and "Levi-Matthew," *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 252-280.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Are miracles the ultimate test that a particular religion or religious leader is genuine? What part will miracles play in the closing events of this world's history? Why must we be very careful about how much faith we put in miracles?**
- ② In your class, discuss in more detail the idea of the danger of taking what are only human traditions and turning them into religious obligations.**
- ③ All the stories we have studied this week involve people considered as second-class by society—the demon-possessed man, Peter's mother-in-law (women were viewed as inferior to men), the leper, the瘫痪者, Levi Matthew. The first four stories involve physical healing, the last one spiritual healing. But the irony is that the teachers of the religion, who thought they were "the righteous" and had no need of a doctor, missed out on Jesus'healing. And though it's easy for us to look down upon the "the righteous" here, in what ways can we by our attitudes toward others reveal the same kind of spiritual disease as did these leaders in Israel?**

Summary: The material of this week's lesson gives us a magnificent picture of Jesus as the Son of God. By expressions like "immediately" and "as soon as," Mark creates a fast-moving account of a dynamic Savior who brings hope and deliverance to all, even though society rejects Him. Jesus the Son of God casts out devils and heals both body and soul.

Heal My Son

Svetlana Chikurova

Svetlana held her tiny baby close as tears streamed down her cheeks. All she wanted was a healthy baby, but the doctor had confirmed her worst fears. Little Vladimir had suffered trauma to his central nervous system during birth; he probably would never walk. His muscles were weak and only would grow weaker.

Svetlana cried out to God for help, for there was no one else to hear her. “God,” she prayed, “my son needs Your healing. My neighbors ask me, ‘Where is your God?’ What can I tell them, God?”

After one doctor’s appointment, Svetlana laid her baby on the couch. Beside him she laid the pile of prescriptions the doctor had given her. “Lord, you have created my child,” she said quietly. “You know his body, and You heard what the doctor said. You see the prescriptions the doctor wrote. I will not buy a single pill, but I lean on You to heal this child.”

After several weeks in which Svetlana saw no improvement, she prayed a prayer of surrender. “Lord, I accept that my child will be sick. Give me strength and love to care for him.” While still kneeling, she saw a vision of how she could massage the baby’s muscles to make them stronger. She began massaging his arms and legs from the extremities to the trunk, and she massaged his back. Every day she massaged his body. By six months Vladimir could sit up.

The doctor was pleased with the boy’s progress and credited the improvement to the medicines she had prescribed. Svetlana did not tell her that she had not given the boy the medicines. “He may walk,” the doctor said thoughtfully, “but he will limp. He will not run, and one side of his body will be weaker than the other.”

Svetlana continued massaging him, especially on his weaker side. Vladimir walked at one year, and by the time he was 3 years old, he could walk without a limp. He showed no sign of the weakness that the doctor predicted. Today Vladimir loves to play soccer and volleyball; he won second place in a ping pong tournament in his region.

Svetlana says, “When someone says there is no God, I tell them, ‘Look at my child. He is evidence that God exists.’ ”

Svetlana Chikurova lives near Zaoksky, Russia.

Sabbath Healings and Hard Hearts



SABBATH AFTERNOON

TROUBLE BREWING. It wasn't long before controversy started to swirl around Jesus. And that's not hard to understand. Anyone saying what He said, and doing what He did, would create controversy.

And yet, it's not all trouble. Besides the Sabbath healing, we follow Jesus as He ordains the Twelve to ministry, this motley group who will change the world forever. And we see Jesus, too, dealing with His own human family and their own misunderstanding of Him and His mission.

But most of all, this week we get another glimpse of the life and ministry of our Savior, whose every word, every act—even when accused of being in league with Satan or of being a Sabbath breaker—should help us love Him even more.

The Week at a Glance: Why did Jesus do healings on the Sabbath? What was the real issue behind the Pharisees' hatred of Christ? What were they trying to protect? What is the unpardonable sin? Why did Jesus mention it when He did?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 2:23–3:35.*

Memory Text: “And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath” (*Mark 2:27, 28*).

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 16.

Made for Man (*Mark 2:23-28*).

Read the account in *Mark 2:23-28*. Analyze Jesus' answer to the scribes and Pharisees. What was the principle for David's actions? In this specific context, what does Jesus mean when He says that the Sabbath was "made for man"? What does that teach us about how we should experience the Sabbath ourselves?

In the world of Jesus' day, two characteristics set the Hebrew nation apart from other people—they worshiped one God instead of many gods, and they refrained from work on the seventh day. Centuries earlier, when they were a free nation, they failed on both these matters, falling into idolatry and Sabbath breaking. Prophet after prophet warned them of the disastrous course on which they were headed, but they continued their downward spiritual slide. Eventually they were carried away captive—the ten northern tribes by Assyria and the Southern Kingdom of Judah 140 years later by the Babylonians.

When they returned from Babylonian captivity, they tried hard to avoid the errors that had led to their earlier loss of nationhood. Attempting to put a hedge around the Sabbath, they formulated detailed lists of what was permitted and not permitted.

The *Mishnah*, the codified traditional law of the Jews, lists 39 major types of labor prohibited on the Sabbath. But "these general regulations were further explained in minute detail. In addition to these major regulations there were countless other provisions concerning the observance of the Sabbath. Most commonly known, perhaps, is the so-called 'Sabbath day's journey' of 2,000 cub.—somewhat less than 2/3 mi. . . . It was also counted as Sabbathbreaking to look in a mirror fixed to the wall . . . , or even to light a candle. . . . It was counted unlawful to expectorate [spit] upon the ground, lest thereby a blade of grass be irrigated. It was not permissible to carry a handkerchief on the Sabbath, unless one end of it be sewed to one's garment—in which case it was no longer technically a handkerchief but part of the garment."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 587.

Whereas the Jewish leaders had become obsessed with detailed regulations, Jesus restored the Sabbath to the purpose for which He created it. The Sabbath was not meant to be a burden but a delight. It was to be a day of worship, relaxation, and restoration; a day of joy; a day that contributes to the happiness of others.

We are told to call the Sabbath a "delight" (*Isa. 58:13*) and to "keep it holy" (*Exod. 20:8*). What is your concept of "delight" and what it means to be "holy"? Why should there be no contradiction between these ideas? How can we make both a part of our Sabbath experience?

The Man With the Withered Hand

Read Mark 3:1-6. Why do you think the leaders wanted to kill Jesus? Was it because He healed on the Sabbath day? Or was there something else going on, a much bigger issue at stake for them? See also John 11:48, Acts 17:6.

Even on the Sabbath, a day for worship and contemplation of heavenly things, the enemies of Jesus could not keep their minds off Him. Instead of opening their hearts to the blessings that God had for them through the reading of Scripture, prayer, and fellowship, they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, waiting to see if they might find an opportunity to accuse Him. They wanted to “prove” that He was a Sabbath breaker, but they themselves were breaking the Sabbath in their hearts.

Mark says that Jesus was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts. Yet, the hardness wasn’t over their firm belief in how the Sabbath should be kept, but it was over their attitude toward Jesus. He threatened their power; He threatened their religious and political influence over the people. That’s why they hated Him so much. Of course, they couldn’t come right out and say that, so they needed to make up some excuses, anything they could find, in order to accuse Him and thus weaken His power. Thus, their fear of losing influence so blinded them that instead of rejoicing in the great power of God being manifested before them by the miracle of the healing, they accused Christ of Sabbath breaking.

Read Mark 3:4. Why didn’t they respond to Christ’s question? Shouldn’t they have had an answer? What does their silence reveal about their true motives?

As human beings, we have a frightening ability to mask our true motives under the cloak of piety or holiness, and what makes it so frightening is that we don’t just cloak it before others, but we cloak it before ourselves. How can we be sure that our religious motives for what we do are pure, or if we are, in our own way, doing the same thing as the Pharisees?

The Twelve Apostles (*Mark 3:7-19*).

This lesson marks an important expansion of Jesus' ministry. Previously He had called various individuals to follow Him; that is, to be disciples. As His fame grew and as He traveled around Galilee, the band of followers continued to grow. It was now time to select some from among the many for a special work.

Mark 3:7-14 gives us a brief but vivid portrayal of the strength of Jesus' movement in Galilee by this time. What do the verses say about the popularity of Christ? In what ways might the answer explain why He decided, at that point, to ordain people to work with Him?

At the height of His popularity Jesus withdrew to a mountainside. Luke supplies an important detail—He spent the night in prayer (*Luke 6:12*). Jesus faced an important decision and, as was His custom, He sought His Father's guidance.

What were the two purposes that Jesus intended for the twelve people He selected to be apostles? *Mark 3:13-19*. What larger purpose, though, was intended? See *Matt. 10:5-15, Mark 16:15*.

The word *apostle* literally means “one who is sent.” The Twelve whom Jesus called would be sent out to preach and to drive out demons. That is, they would be an extension of His ministry while He was still on earth, and after He returned to the Father they would carry on His work. But before being sent, they were to be “with Him”—observing His methods and becoming like Him in character.

As we look at the Twelve, we see a mix of backgrounds, personalities, strengths, and weaknesses. Several were fishermen, one a tax-collector, another a member of the zealots, a strongly nationalistic faction that at times resorted to violence. Simon Peter, bold and impetuous, had much to learn. James and John were fiery tempered. And then there was Judas Iscariot, who would betray Jesus.

There were so many other people in Israel—learned, eloquent, erudite, rich—who could have, it would seem, made a much better nucleus for this new movement. And yet, Jesus chose this bunch? What lessons are here for us about (1) judging the outward character of others, (2) judging another person's spiritual potential, (3) judging what characteristics we deem important in people engaged in ministry?

Jesus and Beelzebub (*Mark 3:22-30*).

The miracles of Jesus were too many and too amazing to deny. A power more than human was at work in Him, but the spies who dogged His footsteps seeking to find grounds to accuse Him refused to admit the obvious—that He was the Son of God. Instead, they tried to argue that Jesus was in league with Beelzebub, the devil.

How did Jesus answer the claim of the critics that He was in league with the devil? *Mark 3:22-27.*

By a simple but effective reply Jesus demolished the accusation of the teachers of the law. Jesus' work tore down the kingdom of Satan: He cast out demons, healed the sick, and set men and women free from the chains of sin and bad habits by which they were bound. This was just the opposite of the manner in which Satan works. If Jesus were in league with the devil, He would do the works of Satan and build up Satan's kingdom, not destroy it.

Why did Jesus, after His specific response to the charges, say what He did about “the unpardonable sin”? What was in their words and attitudes toward Him that would have elicited this strong warning? How were they, by their attitude, doing just what he warned about?

“The Pharisees to whom Jesus spoke this warning did not themselves believe the charge they brought against Him. There was not one of those dignitaries but had felt drawn toward the Saviour. They had heard the Spirit’s voice in their own hearts declaring Him to be the Anointed of Israel, and urging them to confess themselves to His disciples. In the light of His presence they had realized their unholiness, and had longed for a righteousness which they could not create. But after their rejection of Him it would be too humiliating to receive Him as the Messiah. Having set their feet in the path of unbelief, they were too proud to confess their error.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 322.

How, in this context, do we then understand “the unpardonable sin”? What would you say to someone who thought they had committed it? How is the mere fact that they feel this conviction evidence that they have not committed that sin?

Jesus' Mother and Brothers (*Mark 3:31-34*).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus did not receive support from His family. John the beloved tells us plainly: “Even his own brothers did not believe in Him” (*John 7:5, NIV*). His mother, Mary, had stored in her heart the events connected with His birth and childhood (*Luke 2:19, 51*), but she did not understand the mission that Jesus as the Messiah had come to fulfill.

With Jesus surrounded by crowds so that He hardly had time to eat, what did His family members decide to do? (*Mark 3:20, 21*).

The New International Version translates Mark 3:21 as “When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’” Perhaps they were embarrassed by the sort of people Jesus was associating with. Perhaps the accusations of His critics that He was in league with the devil bothered them. And most troubling of all to them was His rejection by the religious leaders, who might have been expected to embrace Him as Israel’s deliverer from the hated Romans.

Analyze Jesus’ response when He received word that Mary and His brothers were standing outside the house looking for Him. Did Jesus not care about His earthly family members? What point was He making by saying: “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother”? *Mark 3:31-34, NIV. See also Deut. 30:20, Matt. 7:21, John 15:14, 1 John 5:3.*

Elsewhere Mark names Jesus’ brothers—James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. He tells us that Jesus also had sisters (*Mark 6:3*). It is significant that Joseph, the husband of Mary, is not mentioned in this incident. The brothers of Jesus here and elsewhere relate to Jesus as a younger brother, telling Him what to do and wanting to take charge of Him. This indicates that Joseph had been married previously and was a widower when he married Mary. During Jesus’ ministry he is never mentioned; presumably he had died by this time. After His resurrection, Jesus’ family saw Him in a new light. His brothers are mentioned as being among the believers at Pentecost (*Acts 1:14*), while Paul calls James, the Lord’s brother, an “apostle” (*Gal. 1:19*).

If you know someone (or perhaps you’re facing it yourself) who’s struggling with family members who don’t understand or appreciate this person’s Adventist faith, what kind of help can you give them? How does today’s study offer encouragement?

Further Study: Work through the seven Sabbath miracles of Jesus, noting why He performed each one, the lessons He sought to teach, and the reactions of His enemies. See *Mark 1:21-28, Mark 1:29-31, Mark 3:1-6, Luke 13:10-17, 14:1-4, John 5:1-15, 9:1-41*. Read “The Sabbath,” “He Ordained Twelve,” and “Who Are My Brethren?,” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 281–289, 290–297, and 321–327.

Discussion Questions:

- ① If some new Adventist came and asked you, What principles can you show me about how to keep the Sabbath, what would you say, and why? Discuss your different approaches as a class.**
- ② What differences will there be in our Sabbath keeping if (1) we observe the Sabbath simply because it is commanded by God or (2) we keep the Sabbath because we love Jesus and want to follow Him? What differences will there be between the two?**
- ③ Why is it so difficult to work with someone who has the attitude of the Pharisees; that is, who has indeed squelched the prompting of the Holy Spirit on his or her heart? What different approaches might you take to try to help that person? Is it ever too late, even for someone who has committed the unpardonable sin? Cannot someone repent from that sin, or does the mere fact that they have committed it mean that it's too late for repentance? Discuss this as a class.**

Summary: Jesus was the Lord of the Sabbath, and He showed His authority by the deeds He did on the Sabbath. What a frightful testimony to the hardness of human hearts that the leaders, those who should have known better, closed themselves off to the very Lord they professed to serve with all diligence and faith. There are lessons here for anyone who believes they are living in service to the Lord.

The Farmer's Dream

Juan Gratica Silva

A farmer in Chile had a dream that Jesus was coming soon. In his dream he was told to tell everyone what he had seen. The farmer had little education, but he did not hesitate. He began visiting his neighbors, giving them his message, "Do you know that Jesus is coming soon?"

The neighbors looked at him curiously. These people considered themselves Christians, but they knew little about God or the Bible. The farmer's message seemed strange to them. But the farmer would not give up. He continued visiting every house in town, asking, "Do you know that Jesus is coming soon?"

He went from door to door, up one street and down another. He stopped people on the street and in cars and asked them, "Do you know that Jesus is coming soon?" People began to refer to the farmer as the "Jesus-is-coming man."

One day a new resident in town answered the farmer's knock at his door. When the farmer asked his familiar question, "Do you know that Jesus is coming soon?" the man smiled.

"Yes, I know that. It is written in the Bible." The man invited the farmer into his home to talk. The farmer rejoiced, for this man was the only person who responded to his questions and wanted to talk about Jesus.

The farmer did not know where in the Bible it said that Jesus would come soon, so the man showed him Jesus' promises. Together they read John 14, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, and parts of 1 Peter. The farmer was so excited to meet this man, for in the whole city of 5,000 people, he at last had met someone who knew that Jesus is coming again.

The man he had met was an Adventist. He invited the farmer to study the Bible with him. The farmer faithfully studied the Bible to learn more about Jesus, who had spoken to him in his dream. In time the man was baptized into the Adventist Church.

Today the farmer and the Adventist layman work together to tell everyone in their town that Jesus is coming soon. They have formed small groups that meet in their homes, and they look forward to the day when the groups will unite to form a single congregation. And it all started because a farmer had a vision and was not afraid to tell everyone that Jesus is coming soon.

Juan Gratica Silva is a pastor in Talca, central Chile.

By Galilee



SABBATH AFTERNOON

THE MAN OF GALILEE. Though Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a small town in the highlands, He made Capernaum, rather than Nazareth (*see Mark 2:1*), the base for His ministry. Capernaum was a city at the north end of the Lake of Galilee and a center of the fishing industry. When Jesus came “home” from His frequent travels, it was to Capernaum.

The Sea of Galilee dominates the landscape of northern Israel. Shaped like a giant heart, it is about thirteen miles long north to south and about eight miles at its greatest width. The greenish blue fresh water lake teems with fish; it is, in places, 130 to 148 feet deep. Because its surface lies about 700 feet below sea level, the climate around the lake is subtropical.

Here is where we find Jesus located in this week’s lesson. Every day’s study places Him either on the lake or on one side or the other.

The Week at a Glance: What lesson was Jesus teaching in the parable of the sower? Why did Jesus compare His eternal kingdom to a seed? What lessons can we learn from the storm on the sea? From the healing of the demoniac? From His ministry to two women almost at the same time? What traditions did Jesus overthrow, and why?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 4:1–5:43.*

Memory Text: “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’” (*Mark 4:41, NIV*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 23.

The Parable of the Sower (*Mark 4:1-20*).

This is one of those rare places in Mark's Gospel where he gives space to Jesus' teaching. Elsewhere he presents Jesus as the Man of action and does not pause to share specifics of His instruction.

The parables of Jesus are famous, even among nonbelievers. Drawn from the events of everyday life, they are simple in wording and ideas, but they teach profound truths. Jesus, the Source of all wisdom, never tried to impress people with His knowledge or dazzle them with intellectual sleight of hand. Instead, He laid truth on the line, presented through the disarmingly simple approach of stories from common life. The other Gospel writers record many more parables of Jesus, and often they have a surprise ending—the first become last and the last first. Those in Mark 4, however, do not share this characteristic.

Study Jesus'parable of the sower and the explanation He gave to the disciples (*Mark 4:3-20*). Is this parable really about the sower, or is it about the different kinds of soil? What is He talking about here?

Who are represented by each of the following?

People along the path:

People in rocky places:

People among thorns:

People in good soil:

Notice that the sower is the same in each case, and so is the seed. God's invitation goes out to all people to accept His salvation and become citizens of His kingdom. However, God never compels. He gives to everyone the opportunity to refuse Him and His gracious offer.

The parable also makes clear that following Jesus is much more than a single decision. Some Christians like to recount the actual day when they were "saved" by accepting Jesus, but the Christian life isn't complete in one day. In this world the Christian's life is a battle and a march; God calls us to grow in grace and in knowledge of Him. As Jesus explained in this parable, some people start well but do not complete the journey; the seed sprouts but never bears fruit.

Think about someone you've known who fits in each of these categories. To the best of your knowledge, what were the deciding factors that placed them there?

The Kingdom Is Like Seed (*Mark 4:21-34*).

In two short but penetrating parables Jesus likens the kingdom of God to seed. What a contrast with the empires that proud, ambitious humans have endeavored to set up. They took as their symbols weapons of brute force, mighty armies, horses and chariots, or in these days tanks, rockets, and fighter planes. “The only power that counts,” said one political leader, “is the power that comes out of the barrel of a gun.” But the Son of God comes to earth, announces that the kingdom of God is coming, and He compares it to seed. What does that mean?

What characteristics of seed are shown in these parables:

The parable of the growing seed (*Mark 4:26-29*)?

The parable of the mustard seed (*Mark 4:30-32*)?

How small is a seed! But it has within it an energy that, released, brings life and growth. The magnificent trees—the oak, the redwood—that stretch toward the heavens and make us feel so puny all began with a seed.

Charlemagne, king of the Holy Roman Empire, bowed to no one. It is said that when the pope was about to place the crown on his head, Charlemagne seized it and crowned himself. Yet this ruler, so strong and feared during his lifetime, at last grew old. Facing death, he left instructions as to how his remains were to be handled: He was to be clad in his royal robes with a crown on his head, scepter in hand, and seated on his throne. Then the tomb was to be sealed tight, never to be broken. He would reign forever even in death!

His servants did as he had instructed and closed the tomb. The years went by; the winds blew and the showers fell on Charlemagne’s tomb. And one day the wind carried a tiny seed, and it lodged in a crack. The rain fell, and the seed sprouted. It found a little soil and put down roots. Its roots expanded the crack, and the wind carried in more soil, and the plant grew larger. It grew and grew until one day the tomb cracked open to reveal a skeleton slumped on a dusty throne, robes rotted away, crown fallen to the earth, scepter in the dust. The mighty Charlemagne’s plans had been defeated by the power of a seed.

What practical steps can help you keep your focus on God’s eternal kingdom, as opposed to earthly temporal things that always end in dust and death? How could these texts help? Matt. 6:19, 2 Cor. 4:18, Phil. 4:8.

Terror by Water (*Mark 4:35-41*).

C. S. Lewis wrote about what a great strain the death of his wife placed on his faith in God. “You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn’t you then first discover how much you really trusted it?”—C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (Harper, San Francisco, 1996), pp. 22, 23.

Keeping Lewis’s words in mind, read **Mark 4:35-41**. How is the same principle he expressed manifested here by the disciples? Why do you think Jesus answered them as He did?

How do we see in this scene a powerful example of both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus?

In verse 38, the disciples asked a question that, no doubt, millions of Christians have asked during times of crisis. And, of course, *by faith* we know the answer. Of course He cares. That was the whole purpose of the Cross, to save us so that we don’t have to perish (*John 3:16, 10:10, 2 Pet. 3:9*). Nevertheless, who hasn’t found themselves in a similar situation, where your “boat” is “full” of water and you are about to go down and you cry out, *God, don’t You care?*

When was the last time you found yourself in a similar situation as the disciples? What happened? Would Jesus have been right in asking you, “How is it that you have no faith?” What did you learn that, you believe, can help you the next time you face something like this?

Two Thousand Dead Pigs (*Mark 5:1-20*).

Read prayerfully and carefully the story given in these verses. If you could draw just one practical lesson from this story, what would it be? (Remember, focus on just one point.)

There are numerous approaches one could take to this story.

If you focused on the power of Jesus to cast out demons, what lessons could you draw from it about the power of God to help you overcome, for instance, habitual sin?

Maybe you focused on the reality of the demons and their power over the man. What lessons can you learn from this about the great controversy and how we need to rely totally on Jesus?

Maybe you focused on the reaction of these swineherders to what had happened to their herd. What lessons could you draw about how worldly considerations can come in and hide the true nature and character of God from us?

Maybe you focused on the reaction of the man to what Christ had done for him. What lessons can you learn from this about how we should respond to what Christ has done for us?

Maybe your emphasis was on what Christ told him to do after he asked to remain with Jesus. What lessons are there about what should motivate us to witness to others about what Christ means to us?

Whatever point you emphasized (and maybe it was another one) and whatever practical lesson you learned, go through the Bible and see if you can find another story, or other texts, that buttress and affirm your position. Take your point to class and share it with others.

A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman (*Mark 5:21-43*).

Back across the lake, probably in Capernaum, Jesus will manifest His power once more in dramatic fashion. His life gives life to the seed, where power works silently but marvelously. His power commanded the winds and the waves to be still and then brought calm to the troubled soul of a wild man. Now His power will drive away long-standing disease and then will raise a young girl to life from the dead.

Read **Mark 5:21-43.** What connections do you find between these two miracles? How do they show Jesus' interest in all types of people?

Here are two females, one at the beginning of womanhood, the other at the end. One has hemorrhaged for 12 years, the other has just reached 12 years of age. Both would be considered insignificant in society: One, because of her bleeding, was ceremonially unclean and defiled anyone who came into contact with her (hence, according to the Levitical law, she made Jesus unclean by touching Him). The other was only a girl, considered to be without status in society. Now she was dead, and to touch a corpse also brought uncleanness. But Jesus, setting aside the misuse of ancient laws took her by the hand and raised her to new life.

Of course, Jesus did this a lot; that is, setting aside misused and misinterpreted laws and regulations that, instead of promoting faith, worked to hinder it (*see Mark 7:13*). His Sabbath healings are, of course, one of the best examples. What about His driving the money-changers out of the temple, where they were used to selling their wares? What about His denouncing the practice of "corban" (*Mark 7:11*)? Or what about His words about washing or about food? Many of these things were, in fact, rooted in the Bible; they had just become perverted through human abuses and their true meaning hidden under human ideas and traditions.

What are certain things in your culture, and maybe even in some interpretations of our faith, that might, for a greater good, be violated? In other words, are there some practices, or some beliefs, that are often held as inviolable that, under the right circumstances, could be violated? If so, does that mean that, perhaps, these practices shouldn't be there at all? How are we supposed to know which should stay or which should go?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White's "‘Peace, Be Still’" and "The Touch of Faith," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 333–348; "‘The Sower Went Forth to Sow’" and "‘First the Blade, Then the Ear,’" in *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 33–69.

Discussion Questions:

- ①** Have someone in the class who has done gardening explain in some detail the principles of what makes soil good for a seed to grow into healthy plants. What spiritual lessons can you learn from these details?
- ②** In the New Testament, the existence of demons is readily apparent. Some try to argue, however, that these were just manifestations of mental illness and that the Bible writers simply did not know any better. How would you respond to such accusations? Why is it important that we, as a people, understand the reality and power of demons?
- ③** In Mark 5:36, Jesus said, "Be not afraid, only believe." Though He spoke in a specific context, what did He mean? How can those words be of value to someone who is now facing a terrible crisis? Why should we not be afraid? And what should we believe?
- ④** Discuss as a class this whole question of what are inviolable practices as opposed to mere traditions. Can traditions, no matter how "sacred," ever work against the truth?

Summary: "Who is this . . . ?" cried out the disciples when Jesus calmed the storm. That exclamation of amazement and awe applied to each part of this week's lesson. Who is this whose kingdom comes not with trumpets blaring and lavish display but silently like the growing seed? Who is this whom demons recognize and before whom they bow? Who is this whose power flows out from the hem of His garment to heal a woman's suffering? Who is this who takes a dead girl's hand and calls her back to life?

This is Jesus who turns upside down earthly expectations. This is Jesus, the Man extraordinary. This is Jesus, the Son of the living God.

Two Invitations

J. H. Zachary

The Hungarian Union conducts soul-winning seminars for its members. Nearly 300 members attended one recent seminar. After discussing how to share Jesus with others, participants divided into teams and went into the city to practice what they had learned.

After some time, two of the seminar participants stepped inside an open church to rest and pray. They heard someone weeping bitterly in the pew behind them. Tivadar, an Adventist pastor, stood and walked to the pew and found an elderly woman weeping. He slipped into the pew and sat beside her.

"I heard you weeping," the pastor whispered. "May I help you?" The woman told him her name was Eszter (Esther). Then she poured out her heart to him.

"A few weeks ago I became seriously ill. I was taken to the hospital, where the doctor told my children that I was dying. But the Lord healed me, and I recovered. When I was released from the hospital, I returned to my apartment to discover someone moving in. I learned that my children had sold my apartment and all of my belongings. Now I have nothing and no place to live."

Pastor Tivadar answered, "I do not know the solution to these serious problems, but God does. May I pray with you?"

"Oh, thank you," she said. Pastor Tivadar prayed for Eszter, then he invited her to attend the seminar the next day. "It is a very spiritual meeting," he encouraged. "You will enjoy it."

"You are from the Adventist Church?" Eszter asked.

"Yes, I am a pastor in the Adventist church," Tivadar replied.

"Yesterday, a woman invited me to attend. I must have misunderstood the address, because I could not find the meeting place. That is why I was weeping here in the church today. God sent you to give me a second chance. Yes, I want to come."

The next day Eszter arrived at the meetings. She told everyone why she was there and thanked God for giving her two invitations to the meeting. "I am all alone in this town, and I need friends. I think God has sent me to some new friends."

Eszter returned the following day and brought two young people with her. She had already become a missionary to others.

The church is working to help meet Eszter's physical and spiritual needs.

J. H. Zachary is a coordinator for outreach among the Muslim and Jewish populations in North America.

Confrontation in Galilee



SABBATH AFTERNOON

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS. “In the latter time he [God] will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (*Isa. 9:1, 2, RSV*). Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. Coming to a people broken by sin, sickness, ignorance, and poverty, He brought salvation, healing, and new life.

Jesus attracted a huge following in Galilee. For a while He was a sensation, but the storm clouds were gathering. Indeed, the movement reaches a critical point when Jesus feeds the 5,000. Enthusiasm builds to a crescendo as the people surge forward to crown Jesus as their king, but Jesus spurns the offer. Disappointed, many now turn away. And, in a grim foreshadowing of the events that await Jesus, Mark reminds us of the fate that befell John the Baptist, who also had been popular for a time.

The Week at a Glance: Why was Jesus rejected at Nazareth? What parallels existed between the actions of Herod and Pilate? Why did so many start turning away from Jesus? Why was Jesus so harsh against many of the religious traditions of His time?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 6:1-7:23.*

Memory Text: “For they all saw him, and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; have no fear’ ” (*Mark 6:50, RSV*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 30.

Confrontation at Nazareth (*Mark 6:1-5; see also Luke 4:16-30*).

News of Jesus and His miracles had spread all over Galilee, so the people of Nazareth had certainly heard about what He was doing. Nazareth was only a village at that time, with perhaps five hundred to six hundred people, and to have one of their number become famous must have led to a lot of talk among its inhabitants. Luke records that in His teaching Jesus said, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard you did in Capernaum’ ” (*Luke 4:23*).

Read carefully **Mark 6:3.** What are the people saying? Why are they saying it? Why do you think they reacted as they did? Didn’t they, on one level, have reasons to be skeptical?

Why were they so offended at Him? See *Luke 4:16-30*.

Australians have a colorful expression to describe the same sort of reaction expressed by the people in Jesus’ hometown. They call it “the tall poppy syndrome.” In a field of poppies, when one grows higher than the rest, people seek to cut it down. They don’t want someone to look better or feel better than the rest of them. A similar idea is found in Scandinavia in the term *Jante law*. This expresses an attitude to anyone in a leadership position who says: “Don’t think you are anything special. You are no better than we are. We put you in that position, and we can just as easily remove you.”

“[Jesus] could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith” (*Mark 6:5, NIV*). The people of Nazareth thought they knew all about Jesus: They had seen Him grow up, knew His parents, brothers, and sisters. To them He was one of them and not anyone special. They thought they knew Him but did not.

In what ways have you misjudged God? Why is it so easy for us, as sinners, to do just that? What lessons have you learned from those mistakes?

The Death of John (*Mark 6:14-22*).

After the account of Jesus sending out the Twelve (*Mark 6:7-13*), Mark adds a detailed record of the circumstances of the death of John the Baptist. This is the only place in his Gospel where Mark diverts from the straight track of portraying Jesus the Man of action. At the outset of his Gospel, Mark gave a brief notice of John the Baptist as the messenger whom God raised up to announce the coming of the Messiah (*Mark 1:2-8*), and he does not mention him again until this point in his narrative. By the time Jesus sent out the Twelve, John had already been murdered, and King Herod speculated that the miracles wrought by Jesus were actually being done by John raised from the dead. The wicked ruler obviously had a troubled conscience over the death of God's servant.

Contrast the actions of Herod here with that of Pilate at the trial of Jesus. See *Matt. 27:11-30, Mark 15:2-20, Luke 23:2-25, John 18:28-38, 19:1-16*.

What role did guilt play in both?

How did both feel about sentencing to death their prisoners?

What role did the wives play in both cases?

What role did worldly kingly power play in both cases?

How were both men manipulated by others?

For Jesus, the news of John's murder and the disgraceful events surrounding it must have come with searching of heart. Not only was He grieved at the loss of His cousin and fellow worker but John's end foreshadowed His own. Ahead of Jesus lay not the executioner's sword but the cross.

In looking at some of the characteristics that both Pilate and Herod displayed, can you see some of the same things in yourself? If so, how can you change? How can you be protected from letting these weaknesses ruin you too?

The Turning Point (*Mark 6:33-46*).

Read Mark's account of the feeding of the five thousand. Study also the parallel account of this event in John 6:1-15, noting especially verses 14, 15. What additional light do you find? Why did Jesus not want them to make Him a king? (*See John 3:14, 7:8, 18:36.*) After all, wasn't Jesus the King?

John tells us the result of Jesus' refusal to be crowned king: "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (*John 6:66, NIV*). In other words, the people became discouraged; their hopes and expectations were dashed; their preconceived notions about whom this Man was weren't fulfilled. And thus, they turned away from Him.

Recount a time in which you turned away from either a person, an organization, whatever, because your expectations weren't met. Were your expectations wrong, or even unrealistic? Should you have done more thinking beforehand? What did you learn from this experience?

In our zeal to win converts, are we not in danger of giving people false expectations about what being a Christian is all about? Should we be promising people that they'll suddenly be happy, fulfilled, healthy, and prosperous if they accept Jesus and join our church? We do have wonderful Bible promises, but these must be kept in context and oftentimes balanced with other texts that let us know the Christian life can sometimes be a struggle, that there are trials, temptations, and suffering along the way. (*See Acts 14:22; 1 Pet. 4:12, 13.*)

What false expectations, if any, did you have regarding what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Christ, and even an Adventist? How did you work through them? What advice would you give to someone who is struggling because of false expectations about either the church or God or both?

Jesus Walks on the Water (*Mark 6:45-56*).

Considering the events depicted in yesterday's lesson, why do you think Jesus chose that particular time to do such an incredible miracle such as walking on the water? What does that tell us about how the Lord will give us what we need to have faith, if we are open to accept it?

After Jesus had walked over the water and entered the boat, it says that the disciples were astonished at what happened. The Greek verb means "astonished beyond comprehension." According to Mark, they didn't consider the miracle of the fish and the loaves, because their hearts were hardened. Even after such an incredible miracle, they still didn't get it.

Review the events in the first six chapters of Mark, up until Christ's walking on the water. What miracles did Jesus perform, and why should they have caused His followers to fully believe in Him? At the same time, what things happened that could have caused them to doubt whom He was? What lessons can we draw from this about faith, about how we get it, about how we maintain it, and about how we could lose it?

As sinful human beings, our natural inclinations are toward evil, toward selfishness, toward sin; thus, it's not natural for us to lean toward a God who is good, selfless, and sinless. No matter what God does for us, no matter how great a view of the Cross we have, no matter what miracles He has done for us, if we don't guard our souls, if we don't cultivate faith, nourish faith, practice faith, and live by faith, our hearts can become hard. Our natural trajectory is downward, earthward, toward self, toward sin, toward death. Only by daily grasping the hand of God, by faith, can we stop the natural downward progression.

Go back over your own walk with the Lord. How were you first converted? What has God done for you since then? Dwell on these things, cling to these things, and pray for the Holy Spirit to purge you of all doubts because of whatever things you don't understand.

Confrontation With the Pharisees (*Mark 7:1-23*).

Read carefully and prayerfully the above texts. If you were asked to summarize, in one sentence, the basic message of the passage, what would you write?

What one passage in these set of verses do you believe catches the essence of what Jesus is saying here? Why did you choose this one text?

Oftentimes critics of religion claim that religion is a man-made construct used to give a certain class of people power over another class. And yet, and here's the irony, this is exactly what Jesus is dealing with. These rituals were being used to help consolidate the power and wealth of the priestly class over and against others.

For instance, God had given instructions regarding defilement in the book of Leviticus, but many more regulations had been added over the centuries. The effect was to exclude more and more of the common people—the sick, maimed, infirm, lepers, and those who did not measure up to the regulations of ritual purity—from the temple services, leaving it, and the power that came with it, in the hands of a small select group.

It's a scary thought (and it should be) that Jesus spent so much of His time fighting, not against pagans or skeptics or agnostics but against very religious people who believed that they were defending their faith. It's scary, too, that in their zeal to defend the commandments of God they actually produced traditions and commandments that at times nullified the commandments they were supposed to be protecting (*see Mark 7:1-11*).

The greatest motive in the world is to do things out of love for God. At the same time, it's also potentially the most dangerous of all motives. Why is that so? Why must those who believe that they are acting in behalf of their God be very careful in what they do in God's "behalf"?

Further Reading: Read Ellen G. White’s “The First Evangelists,” “Come Rest Awhile,” “Give Ye Them to Eat,” “A Night on the Lake,” “The Crisis in Galilee,” and “Tradition,” in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 349–371, 377–398.

Discussion Questions:

- ①** In class, have people relate some times where they, believing they were acting in behalf of God, now believe that they made a mistake. What did they do? How did they treat people? What might they have done differently if they knew what they know now? What lessons did they learn that might be able to help others from making the same mistakes?
- ②** What did Jesus mean in Mark 7:20 about defilement? How is Jesus defining defilement here? How is it different from how the rabbis seemed to understand defilement? What principle is made manifest by this difference?
- ③** Jesus spoke very harshly about human traditions. Do you think He was against tradition? If not, why the hard words? What are some of your traditions? Where did they originate from? How do they stand in contrast to the “commandments of God”? Might some of your traditions need to be examined in the context of what Jesus said in Mark 7? How would they fare?

Summary: For many months Jesus has enjoyed huge popular support in Galilee, but a change is coming. We see Him, first of all, rejected by His own people and then by even larger crowds. And we see Jesus confronting the religious establishment in His strongest rebuke to date. No niceties of expression, no mincing of words: These leaders, so proud of their strict observances, are really lawbreakers; their profession is a sham, a hypocrisy.

Jesus is indeed heading toward the Cross.

The French Exam

Ludmilla Mladenova

Lucy is a university student in Bulgaria. She and her brother are the only Adventists in their family. Sometimes they found it difficult sharing their faith with their parents.

Lucy was struggling with a French class that she had to complete in order to graduate. Many of the students in her class knew far more French than she did, and she wondered if she would ever catch up. At the end of the first grading period, the teacher announced that the exam would have two parts—written and oral. They would take the written exam together, but each student would take the oral exam individually.

One of Lucy's friends in the class asked to take the oral exam first because she had an appointment. After the exam, she stopped to see Lucy. She told Lucy that the teacher asked her to choose one of five topics to discuss orally. She discussed the topic she had chosen and how she thought she had done on her exam.

After her friend left, Lucy wrestled with her conscience. Should she study this one question? No, that would be cheating. She decided to ignore what her friend had told her and let the teacher choose the discussion topic for her. Lucy continued preparing for the oral exam as if she had heard nothing her friend had said.

When she arrived to take the test, the teacher asked her to discuss the same question that her friend had been given. She was surprised at how easily the ideas came to her in French. Words that she had never remembered learning flowed from her mouth. When she finished the oral exam, she thanked God that she had trusted Him to lead her.

Later Lucy learned that her friend had told several other students what her topic of discussion was, and the teacher suspected that they knew. She was glad that she had asked the teacher to select the topic for her.

When the exam results were posted, Lucy's grade was near the top of her class. For some students the exam was a disaster; for Lucy, it was a wonderful affirmation of faith and honesty.



Ludmilla Mladenova (left), as Lucy, continues to study in Sofia, Bulgaria.

The Passion Predicted



SABBATH AFTERNOON

BORN TO DIE. With all the controversies that have swirled around Jesus of Nazareth down through the ages, the one fact agreed upon by believer and skeptic alike is that He died on a Roman cross. But the Christians never attempted to deny or explain the Cross away. They were not embarrassed by it. Rather, they had the attitude of the apostle Paul: “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (*Gal. 6:14*).

For Paul and the other believers, the Cross was more than a miscarriage of justice. Instead, it was part of the outworking of God’s plan to save the world. The Cross was necessary, and indispensable. Jesus was indeed born to die. As powerful a witness and example that His life provides, it is His dying—and only His dying—that will solve forever the problem of sin and evil.

The Week at a Glance: Why did Jesus talk to the Syro-phenician woman as He did? How did Jesus work to remove prejudice from His disciples? How many options does Jesus leave us in regard to His identity? What does it mean to “take up the cross”?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 7:24–9:13*.

Memory Text: “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (*Mark 8:34*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 7.

Dogs Eat the Crumbs

The journey to Syrophoenicia was one of the longest that Jesus took during His ministry and brought Him to the farthest point northward. Even here, far from Capernaum and the familiar sights of Galilee, Jesus' presence could not be kept secret. Word about Him had reached into this region, leading an unnamed Gentile woman to hope that He might be able to help her demon-possessed daughter.

Study the incident with the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). Compare the parallel account in Matthew's Gospel (15:21-28). Why did Jesus speak to her as He did? What indicates that the woman did not understand Jesus' words to be a rebuke?

Although Jesus' words about the dogs seemed to slight her, the woman must have detected something in His manner and tone of voice that made her realize that He did not mean to call her a "dog," that He was responding as the Jews typically would in order to teach His disciples a lesson. Indeed, perhaps the saddest part of this whole account is what appears in Matthew, with the attitude of the disciples. They, the very ones who should have been encouraging her, who should have been eager for everyone to benefit from Jesus, were, instead, working against the purposes of the Lord. They let their own prejudices and preconceived notions of God and truth and faith work against God and truth and faith. Hence, Jesus said what He did to the woman probably more for the benefit of His own disciples than for her.

Despite so many factors working against this woman, so many reasons to not have hope, Jesus says to her: “‘Woman, you have great faith!’” (Matt. 15:28, NIV). As we look at this woman, we can see many great elements of faith being manifested despite so many factors working against her. What was working against her, and yet, what elements of faith did she manifest anyway? And, most importantly, how can we ourselves manifest these elements in our own lives even when we face many discouraging things?

Jesus Feeds the 4,000 (Mark 8:1-22).

Earlier, Jesus had fed the 5,000 in Galilee. Now He does a similar miracle in the Decapolis region, to the east of the Lake of Galilee. Notice the attitude of the disciples. Though they had seen Jesus feed the 5,000 some months before, they again question His ability to care for this situation.

“Again the disciples revealed their unbelief. At Bethsaida they had seen how, with Christ’s blessing, their little store availed for the feeding of the multitude; yet they did not now bring forward their all, trusting His power to multiply it for the hungry crowds. Moreover, those whom He had fed at Bethsaida were Jews: these were Gentiles and heathen. Jewish prejudice was still strong in the hearts of the disciples.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 405.

To the disciples the amazing and unexpected thing was not that Jesus could supply the bread but rather that He would do so for Gentiles. What does their reaction (as seen also in yesterday’s lesson) teach us about the power of prejudice to negate the impact of the gospel in our lives?

Probably one of the greatest tragedies in Christian history has been the racial bigotry spewing from those who claimed Jesus as their Lord and Master. It’s a scary testimony to the evil of prejudice that even among churchgoers evils such as racism, tribalism, rampant nationalism, and bigotry have remained entrenched. Even worse, people have attempted to use the Bible to sanction these attitudes, much to the detriment of the Christian witness. It’s one of the tragic ironies of history that people should promote prejudice by using a book that was meant to expunge it.

Below are a few texts dealing,in their own way, with the issue of bigotry and prejudice. Using them, and whatever other ones you can think of, write out a paragraph stating what you believe is the Bible’s basic message on this topic. How well do you, or does your church, measure up to what the Bible says about this? What might need to be changed? Gen. 18:18, Isa. 56:7, Mark 11:17, Luke 6:27, Acts 10:28, 17:26, 2 Cor. 5:19, Col. 3:11, 1 John 2:2, Rev. 14:6.

The World's Greatest Question

"Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?'"

"They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.'

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" "

"Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.'

"Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him" (*Mark 8:27-30, NIV*).

Why is Jesus' question, "Who do you say I am?" (*Mark 8:29*) the most important question in the world? What's wrong with the logic of those who give the following answers to this question? (1) Jesus was just a good man; (2) Jesus was just a wonderful teacher; (3) Jesus was just the greatest Person who ever lived. See *Matt. 18:20, 26:64; also John 8:58; 10:30; 11:25, 26; 14:6*.

Notice how C. S. Lewis deals with all such answers:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. 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—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—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 patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us."—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 1996), p. 56.

In verse 29 the "you" is emphatic in the original text. Jesus asked the question in such a way that the disciples were forced to give a personal answer. The question comes to every person today with just the same force, challenging us all to search our hearts and give an honest response. Every one's eternal destiny hangs on the answer he or she gives; for if, like Peter, they acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, their lives cannot stay the same.

Many people speak highly of Jesus. They take offense at those who assert that Jesus is the only way of salvation. How shall we help such people to confront the searching question: "Who do you say I am?"

The Cross, Jesus' and Ours (*Mark 8:31–9:1*).

For us, long centuries after the Cross, the idea of Christ, the Messiah, suffering and dying is fundamental to our faith. Yet, imagine yourself in the role of Peter and the disciples, who have a whole other conception of what they believe the Messiah would do. How did Peter and the disciples react to the idea that Jesus must suffer? (*Mark 8:31–33*). Why do you think they reacted as they did? Might there have been some personal, even selfish reasons, for their reaction?

“The very vehemence of their opposition is meant to suggest that it is more than a matter of the intellect, more than a simple failure to understand what Jesus meant; the disciples did not want Jesus to suffer. And that was because it goes against the grain to be the followers of a Messiah who suffers instead of producing spectacular victories by an effortless exercise of power; it brings no kudos, and offends the pride of the natural man. And judged by ordinary standards, there seems no point in the suffering and death of the Messiah. What is more, if it is the will of God that the Messiah should suffer, it might well be his will that the Messiah’s disciples should suffer a similar fate; from that again the natural man shrinks. So by their reaction to Jesus’ prophecy the disciples reveal even more clearly than before the truth about themselves, that their minds and wills are governed by the standards of this world, of the unredeemed, natural man—‘ ‘they think as men think’ ’ (v. 33).”—D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1963), p. 226.

What does it mean to “take up the cross” and follow Jesus? What does Jesus mean by our need to deny self and by losing our lives? Most of us find these notions rather unpleasant. Why?

In this context, read Galatians 2:19, 20. How have you (if you have professed Christ) experienced what Paul is talking about here? If someone were to look at your life, what examples would they see of this principle? If none, what does that tell you about your walk with the Lord?

The Transfiguration (*Mark 9:2-13*).

Read the account in *Mark 9:2-13* and in *Luke 9:28-36* about the Transfiguration. Who was involved in this incredible scene? Who benefited from it, and why? Why do you believe this happened when it did?

How fascinating that the voice of the Father from heaven should say to the disciples, “This is my beloved Son: hear him” (*Mark 9:7*). Though they certainly had so many reasons to believe in Jesus and His authority, they had a hard time with Him talking about being rejected and dying, even the point where Peter rebuked Jesus for talking that way (*Mark 8:32*). Thus, the Voice from heaven, whatever else it might have accomplished, certainly gave them more impetus to, indeed, “hear him.”

Read *2 Peter 1:16-21*, Peter’s later account of the Transfiguration. What point was he making by talking about this event?

At the same time, too, there’s no doubt this experience was a blessing to Jesus, as well, a reaffirmation of the Father’s love as Jesus, now in human form, would soon set His face to go to Jerusalem and certain death. Three times the Father audibly declared the divine identity of Jesus Christ (*Mark 1:11, 9:7, John 12:28*), and each occasion marked a turning point in Jesus’ ministry, a time when Jesus, in His humanity, was to face a great trial.

No matter who we are or at what stage we are in our walk with the Lord, we all face moments of discouragement, moments in anticipation of an upcoming trial. What does it say to us that even Jesus, the Lord Himself, benefited from an encouraging word? How have you been benefited by someone who spoke words of encouragement? If you know people who are going through a hard time, consider what you could say to help them in the same way that the voice of the Father helped Jesus and the disciples.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White's "Barriers Broken Down," "The True Sign," "The Foreshadowing of the Cross," and "He Was Transfigured," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 399–425.

Discussion Questions:

- ① The concept of identity is powerful. Human beings want to belong to something. Unfortunately, there is a natural tendency to deem one's group, be it racial, national, religious (or any combination thereof) as superior to others. This, of course, can lead to bigotry and even subtle forms of prejudice. The earlier followers of Jesus weren't immune to this problem. We, no doubt, aren't either. What can we learn from Jesus that can change this sinful trait, which, unless checked, manifests itself in all of us?
- ② Go back and read from Tuesday's lesson the quote that C. S. Lewis wrote about the identity of Jesus. How, in a parallel manner, could that logic be used in defense of the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White? What claims did she make about herself? What are some of the incredible things she claimed to have seen in vision? Why, then (again using the same kind of logic that Lewis used), would it be "patronizing nonsense" to simply assert things about her like, "Well, she was just a good woman but had no prophetic gift"? Does she not leave us the choice of either accepting her as someone who manifested the gift of prophecy or as a lunatic, a fool, or even worse?

Summary: It is easier to believe in a Messiah who will lead a victorious army and bring freedom and full stomachs than one whose path leads to Calvary. Jesus was not the Messiah of popular expectation. His badge was a cross, not a crown. And He was God's Messiah for everybody, not just for the Jews. The disciples had much to learn and a great deal to unlearn. We see Jesus patiently attempting to set their thinking straight, as the shadow of the Cross begins to loom.

“Take Me With You!”

Bartolomé Funez Castellón

I grew up in a devout family, and as a child I dreamed of becoming a priest. But because my parents were not married, the church refused to let me study for the priesthood. Disappointed, I joined the army.

Through the difficulties associated with military service, I never forgot God. I carried my Bible with me and read it whenever I had a chance.

In 1996 I was transferred to the capital city, and there I worked in a military office. One day a young secretary in our battalion asked permission to leave work early so she could attend church. I told her she could go if she would invite me to go with her. She was surprised, but she quickly agreed, and we went to church together.

I noticed the differences between this young woman’s church—the Adventist church—and the church I had grown up in. I liked the sense of order and reverence I saw there, and I especially liked the way the people studied the Bible together. The priest did not tell them what to believe; they read the Bible and discovered for themselves, as I had been trying to do.

Two Adventist brothers in my battalion invited me to talk to their youth group about the rights and obligations of Honduran citizens. After I accepted the invitation, I began to get really nervous. What had I gotten myself into? When I arrived at the church, I found not only young people, but adults were there, too—and the pastor! I was shaking, but somehow I finished my talk.

The people thanked me, and some asked me to come back and speak again. I was impressed with how polite these people were.

I joined a small group that the Adventist secretary attended. I was more comfortable there than at the large church. I was learning so much so fast, and I enjoyed it all very much. I met this girl’s father, and he gave me some

Bible study guides that I read and filled out. Before long I was attending the regular church services. I joined the seekers’ Bible study class, and in time I was baptized.

I am still in the military, and now I share my faith with other soldiers. Now when I am asked to preach in church, I no longer shake when I stand up front. I thank God for leading this sheep into His fold.



Bartolomé Funez Castellón (left) lives in Choluteca, Honduras.

Ad



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Teaching *the Disciples*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

A MOTLEY BUNCH. A Christian magazine once suggested how a consultant team might have evaluated the disciples of Christ: "Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no leadership qualities. The sons of Zebedee, James and John, place personal interests above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.

"We feel that it is our duty to tell You that Matthew has been black-listed by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

"One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness. . . . We recommend Judas Iscariot as Your controller and right-hand man."—*The Baptist Messenger*, Sept. 27, 1984.

The Week at a Glance: What can cause us to be spiritual failures? In what ways did the disciples show their spiritual failing? What did Jesus say about divorce? Why did Jesus treat children as He did? What crucial point did Jesus make about the potential dangers of wealth?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 9:14–10:31.*

Memory Text: "‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all’" (*Mark 9:35, NIV*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 14.*

A Public Failure (*Mark 9:14-32*).

Peter would have liked to have remained on the mountain with Jesus, Elijah, and Moses (*Mark 9:5*). He suggested that he build three shelters for the Master, Moses, and Elijah. How nice if Jesus could stay a while in that place of glorious light. But Jesus' mission called Him to leave the peace, encouragement, and heavenly communion of the mountain top and return to the valley. To the people, difficult, smelly, slow to learn, but needy—that is where His work lay.

From the glory of heaven to the pain of a fallen world. From the heights to the depths of human depravity. From the fellowship of Moses and Elijah to a despairing man with a demon-possessed boy who cannot speak and rolls foaming on the ground. From heavenly light to the disciples who have failed miserably.

Read **Mark 9:14-32.** Previously they had gone out without Jesus and had been able to cast out demons (see *Mark 6:12, 13*), but now they failed. What do we find in the texts that reveal why they failed?

The disciples had often witnessed Jesus casting out demons and healing the sick. They themselves had been able to do the same miracles when Jesus sent them out two by two. But familiarity had bred carelessness. That which was marvelous and accomplished only by divine power had begun to seem commonplace.

"Their unbelief, that shut them out from deeper sympathy with Christ, and the carelessness with which they regarded the sacred work committed to them, had caused their failure in the conflict with the powers of darkness. . . . In order to succeed in such a conflict they must come to the work in a different spirit. Their faith must be strengthened by fervent prayer and fasting, and humiliation of heart. They must be emptied of self, and be filled with the Spirit and power of God. Earnest, persevering supplication to God in faith—faith that leads to entire dependence upon God, and unreserved consecration to His work—can alone avail to bring men the Holy Spirit's aid in the battle against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of the world, and wicked spirits in high places."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 430, 431.

In what ways has your spiritual life been a failure? What do you attribute those failures to? What do you need to change about your spiritual life, and what principles did you learn from today's lesson and texts that could help you make those changes?

True Greatness (*Mark 9:33-50*).

Mark 9:32 is incredibly instructive, for it gives great insight into the minds of the disciples at this point. Here's their Master, giving them words of truth, and yet, because it's not what they want to hear, they make no attempt to learn more. They, in a real sense, are hiding from the truth when the truth isn't exactly what they want to hear. How do we, in our own way, do the same thing?

How were the spiritual consequences, the fruits, of such an attitude readily seen in the next few verses? How did their words reveal just how far they were from the true principles of Christ's kingdom?

Read the whole section for today, focusing in particular on verses 33-37 and 42-50. Though Jesus is not talking about the same subject in each section, there's an underlying spiritual theme in His words here that are crucial for anyone who claims to be a Christian. It's a theme that goes to the heart of the spiritual problem that was revealed by the disciples' quest to be the "greatest." What is it, and why is it so important? What other verses can you find in the Bible that express the same idea?

There's a branch of philosophy called "ethical egoism," which teaches that each person ought to look after his or her own interests and disregard the interests of others, except where the interest of others contributes toward his or her own interests. In other words, people ought to look out only for themselves. That's an attitude which, really, doesn't need to be taught, because it's already wired in our genes.

If there were no God, no final judgment and final reckoning, what grounds would you have to defend "ethical egoism"? Why, though, for the Christian is such a position unacceptable?

Reformation in Divorce (*Mark 10:1-12*).

Read **Mark 10:1-12.** What point is Jesus making here about divorce? What message does He have for us today on this painful topic? See also *Matt. 19:1-10*.

Probably no issue causes more debate among Seventh-day Adventists today than divorce and remarriage. The same was true of Jesus' time. The Jews had only the Old Testament, but one passage in it was fiercely debated. This was Deuteronomy 24:1, 2: "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife." The two schools of rabbis of Jesus' time, the followers of Hillel and the followers of Shammai, argued over the meaning of "some uncleanness," some believing that it could mean something as trivial as burning a meal, while others took a much more strict approach. Jesus, though, makes it clear that there should be no divorce except in the case of marital infidelity.

Notice how Jesus, in the discussion, moves away from Deuteronomy and goes back to the early chapters of Genesis as His scriptural authority. What point was He making from those texts? (Also, what does that tell us about how He viewed, not only the historical accuracy of Genesis but also its authority?)

Mark tells us that the disciples asked Jesus for further explanation of His answer to the Pharisees (*Mark 10:10*). Indeed, Jesus' view of marriage, adultery, and divorce ran counter to many of the ideas current in Jewish society, which placed husbands and wives on different footings. Christ's words, however, showed that men as well as women can both be guilty of adultery.

How do we as individuals, and as a church, strike a balance between demanding that members adhere to the Bible standard about marriage and divorce and yet show mercy toward those who fall short?

The Children (*Mark 10:13-16*).

Mark tells us that Jesus was “much displeased” at the disciples’ attitude toward the little children. The original Greek word is strong, suggesting indignation. Considering previous examples of their attitude toward each other (*Mark 9:33, 34*) and toward Gentiles (*Matt. 15:23*), why do you think the disciples reacted as they did toward the children?

Our attitude toward children reveals much about us. To communicate with children requires that we go outside the world of our own self; we have to listen and seek to understand a wholly different reference point. Thus, people who are wrapped up in themselves cannot get close to children. Likewise, people who are always looking to gain some benefit or advantage for themselves from any encounter will have little time for children. The fact that Jesus was so open to children and they to Him speaks volumes about the Master as One whose life flowed out to others, regardless of status. Likewise, the disciples’ attitude to the children who were being brought to Jesus shows how much they need to grow in self-forgetfulness and blessing to others.

Jesus told the disciples, “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (*Mark 10:15, NIV*). What did He mean? In what ways were His words reflecting a principle that the disciples, by their attitude toward the children, really needed to understand? Compare what you write with what others in the class have to say. See also *Matt. 6:9, Luke 11:13, Eph. 5:8, 1 Pet. 1:14, 1 John 5:21*.

There’s an innocence to children, an openness, a trusting and humility in them that followers of our heavenly Father need to have in their own lives. Children, in their innocence, are much less likely than adults to judge or to manifest prejudice toward others. Children are helpless, totally depending upon the mercy and love of those who can do for them what they cannot do for themselves. No wonder Jesus told us that we need to be like them.

Write out a prayer asking God to give you a more childlike faith. What things are you asking for? What practical things can you do, even now, to help get them?

Attitudes Toward Riches (*Mark 10:17-31*).

In the final area of teaching for the disciples that we study this week, we see Jesus trying to correct their wrong views about wealth. The disciples at first were “astonished” at Jesus’ words and then were “greatly astonished” (vss. 24, 26, *NKJV*). They had accepted the prevailing understanding—one fostered by the scribes and Pharisees—that material prosperity and health were evidence of God’s blessing, while poverty and sickness indicated God’s displeasure. The same thinking led them, on seeing a man blind from birth, to ask Jesus: “‘Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” (*John 9:1, 2, NIV*).

Study the story of the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-22 (see also Matt. 19:16-22 and Luke 18:18-23). Summarize what you think the basic spiritual message there is for us today.

Consider the following characteristics of the young man who had so much but lacked the most important quality of all: He was young. He was energetic (came running to Jesus). He was respectful (knelt before Jesus). He already was in a position of authority. He had great wealth. He was concerned about spiritual things. What a great candidate for the kingdom of God!

Is Jesus’ test to the rich young ruler to be applied to everyone who would be Jesus’ disciple? That is, should everyone be expected to sell all their possessions and give to the poor? If not, why not? (Hint: Compare Jesus’ instructions to other rich people who came to Him, such as Zacchaeus [Luke 19:1-9] and Nicodemus [John 3:1-21].)

In many ways, the key verse for understanding this chapter, and the answer to the above question, is Mark 10:24. The issue isn’t wealth but how the one who has wealth relates to it. Jesus, knowing the rich young ruler’s heart, knew what his weakness was. Indeed, the fact that the rich young ruler turned away from Jesus proved that his wealth was an idol. More than likely, if wealth were the man’s problem, Jesus wouldn’t have said to him what He did.

Read again verse 24. What’s wrong with trusting in riches? What other word could you replace “riches” with that would express the same principle? What point is Jesus teaching us? In your own life, what other word might you, if honest with yourself, place in there?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Ministry,” “Who Is the Greatest?” “Blessing the Children,” and “One Thing Thou Lackest,” in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 426–442, 511–523.

Discussion Questions:

- ①** As a class, discuss some of the issues that cause even believers to doubt God, to question their faith, to be afraid to trust in the Lord. What causes these feelings? Are they ever justified? How can you help people overcome their doubts, their fears, their lack of faith?
- ②** As a class, pick out a few names of people whom the world deems as “great”; that is, they are famous for some “good” reason or another. What were the qualities that made them “great” in the eyes of the world? At the same time, think of someone whom God Himself might deem as “great.” What qualities made that person “great” in the eyes of God? How differently would you define the word *great* in both cases? What lesson can we learn from this comparison?
- ③** The week’s lesson talked about our attitude toward children. What other kinds of people do we interact with who really, in the end, can do nothing for us in terms of material or social or political advantage? How do we treat them in contrast to someone who can indeed do a lot for us? What does Christ’s example say to us about this topic? What can we do to help us treat people the way Jesus treated them? What about us needs to change to enable us to do just that?

Summary: This week we saw Jesus deal with the wrong attitude and behavior of His own followers. And though they often failed, lovingly and patiently Jesus tried to correct their wrong thinking and behaviors.

The Prodigal's Second Chance

Randriamalala Narison Olivier

I grew up in a Christian home in Madagascar, but I chose a different path in life. Eventually I became a drug addict and a thief. One day I borrowed a friend's bicycle to run an errand. I did not return the bicycle but instead sold it to buy drugs. When my parents learned what I'd done, they told me to leave their home. I lived on the streets of my city until I was arrested for the theft.

Prison was miserable, but there I realized my need of God. I began to pray. I learned that an Adventist chaplain held services in the prison, and I decided to go. At the first meeting some prisoners sang a song titled, "Change Me, Jesus." The song touched my heart and became my prayer.

We were given only one meal a day of boiled casava. I was often hungry. But after I began attending the worship services, the Bible became my food. I knew that if I turned away from God this time, it might be my last chance. I gave my life to Christ and enrolled in the prison's Bible study.

I had been in prison only a month when my friend whose bicycle I had stolen asked the judge to free me. Upon release, I found an Adventist church. I attended church faithfully. When I learned that my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, I begged God to free me from my addictions to alcohol and tobacco. I asked the pastor and church members to pray for me, and after several weeks, I lost my appetite for these drugs. I continued Bible studies with the pastor and was baptized.

My parents invited me to return home, and I have. They can see the changes in me. I want to be an honorable son, to let my parents see the difference God is making in my life and ask questions about my faith. I want them to ask questions about what I believe rather than to preach at them.

I work with my father, who has given me Sabbaths off to worship. My younger brother goes to church with me and wants to study at the Adventist college. My father has agreed to send him there.

"I have returned to my father's house a changed son," Olivier says. "I am determined to remain faithful to my heavenly Father and honor my parents. I am praying for my parents and younger brothers, that they will not follow my naughty ways but will follow God."

Randriamalala Narison Olivier lives in Antananarivo, Madagascar.

The Final Journey



SABBATH AFTERNOON

TO JERUSALEM. Through the past several chapters of Mark, Jesus has been on a long, meandering journey. Now Mark tells us the goal of this trip south from Galilee: “They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid” (*Mark 10:32, NIV*).

It is a dramatic scene: Jesus going on ahead, the disciples a step behind, wondering what is about to happen, and others in back of them feeling apprehensive. The last, climactic events are about to begin.

We have now come to the last seven days or so of Jesus’ earthly life. As do the other Gospel writers, Mark devotes disproportionate space to this short period, 6 of the 16 chapters that comprise his book. For Matthew, the numbers are 7 chapters out of 28; for Luke, 6 chapters out of 24; and for John, 10 chapters out of 21. The implications are clear: As important as the life and teachings of Jesus were, His death and resurrection were even more important.

The Week at a Glance: Why do we sometimes pray for the wrong things? What does it mean to live in light as opposed to darkness? Why did Jesus cleanse the temple a second time? Why did Christ curse the fig tree?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 10:32–11:25.*

Memory Text: “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (*Mark 10:45, RSV*).

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 21.*

Foolish Request (*Mark 10:32-45*).

After reading the entire selection for today, focus on verse 35. Considering all the miracles that they had seen Jesus already do, why was their request so “reasonable”? How do we, in our own way, make “reasonable” requests from God (*read also Matthew 17:20, Luke 1:37*) that are not answered as we think they should be?

As humans, we view the world from a very narrow perspective: our own. And no matter what light and truth we are given, no matter what we learn, we still filter it all through ourselves, through the very narrow and confined view of the world that we, as fallen beings, have. Thus, oftentimes we request things that we believe would be good for us and yet, in the grand scope of things, aren’t—though we are utterly convinced they are and God should give them to us immediately.

How did the request of James and John reveal their ignorance for what they were asking?

How does Christ’s response in *Mark 10:42-45* expose their ignorance?

Even the disciples, after all this time with Jesus, revealed their blindness to the most important spiritual things. Christ’s words in verses 42-45 represent a radically different view of what leadership, power, and success mean. It’s a great example of how perverted our own views of the world are. No wonder, then, that like the disciples, we can pray for things that we think are good and needed when in the end we, as James and John, don’t know what we are asking for.

Are you still waiting for prayers that have yet to be answered? What are they, and how can you, by faith, believe that there’s a good reason (which you still can’t understand) why they aren’t answered as you wish?

Blind Bartimaeus (*Mark 10:46-52*).

Jesus was on His way up to Jerusalem, and Jericho was the last city or village He would pass through on His way there. His mind must have been filled with the events that the next few days would bring. He had come to the final week of His life, to the climax of His work that would decide the destiny of the world forever and the outcome of the long controversy with evil. But with so much to occupy His thoughts, He nevertheless took the time to help a blind beggar.

Study the encounter between Jesus and blind Bartimaeus (*Mark 10:46-52*). Notice what happened after Jesus healed him. How, in one sense, is this incident symbolic of what should be the experience of everyone who has experienced the saving power of Christ in their lives?

Numerous times, the Bible talks about those who don't know the Lord as walking in darkness (*John 8:12, Acts 26:18, Eph. 5:8, Col. 1:13, 1 Thess. 5:5, 1 Pet. 2:9, 1 John 1:6, 2:11*). The main thing about darkness, of course, is that there is no light. Those who move in darkness stumble, grope, fall, and even if they move ahead, they don't know which direction they are going in.

All this, though, changes when we come to Jesus, who is light. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (*1 John 1:5-7*).

These images, that of darkness and light, are metaphors, symbols depicting something else other than themselves. Darkness means spiritual ignorance, it means sin, hatred, prejudice, jealousy, greed, covetousness. Those who walk in darkness live without the saving knowledge of God, without understanding the reality of who God is and the love that He has for us. And just as light is the opposite of darkness in a literal sense, it's also the opposite in a spiritual sense, as well.

Before being saved by Christ, you lived in darkness (whether you knew it or not). After coming to Christ, you came to the light. Write down just what new things you "saw" after coming to the light. How did they change your life? Where would you be now if you had remained in the darkness?

The Triumphal Entry (*Mark 11:1-11*).

The triumphal entry occurred on Sunday, one week before the Resurrection. Christians of various persuasions celebrate the day in various ways. For some, it is “Palm Sunday” and is marked by appropriate hymns, Scripture readings, and sermons. Seventh-day Adventists do not follow a liturgical year; that is, a worship calendar that designates each Sabbath through the year in terms of Scripture passages and sermons. However, we are keenly interested in the life of Jesus, and especially its closing scenes. Therefore, the events of the last Sunday of Jesus’ life provide material for deep contemplation.

How did Jesus go out of His way to draw attention to His entry into Jerusalem? (*Mark 11:1-11*).

What was the significance of His riding on a colt and coming from the Mount of Olives? (*see Zech. 9:9*).

Jesus could have come up to Jerusalem quietly, as He had before. But He chose to draw attention to Himself. He sent His disciples to obtain a colt, and He entered the city from the Mount of Olives. These acts were not lost on the crowd, who already were waiting for Him to act as the longed-for Messiah. Although Jesus would not act the part of political leader and deliverer that they hoped for, He was the Messiah. So, He deliberately entered the beloved city in the manner that the prophet Zechariah had foretold. And the crowd went wild!

“Hosanna. Gr. *hosanna*, a transliteration of the Aramaic *hoshar’na*, meaning ‘save, now’ or ‘save, I pray thee.’ . . . Here the expression may be considered a prayer to God that salvation may come to Israel through Messiah King.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 471.

What a start to the Passover week! But the same crowds who shouted “Hosanna!” and spread their garments in the way on Sunday by Friday were shouting: “Away with Him! Crucify Him!”

We all have spiritual highs and lows, times when we feel very enthusiastic about God and our faith and times when we are discouraged, filled with doubt, and barely hanging on. Like the crowd, we’re one minute praising God and the next turning away from Him. How do you work your way through these spiritual lows? What lessons have you learned from these times that you could share with someone who, perhaps, is going through a low time now? What Bible verses did you find especially helpful?

A Den of Thieves (*Mark 11:12-19*).

In the selection for today, read carefully verse 17, the Old Testament verse that Jesus quoted. What was the temple supposed to be? What had it become? What crucial lesson is in there for us, not only as individuals but as a church?

Just as Jesus had deliberately drawn attention to Himself by the manner of His entry into Jerusalem, so His first act in the city was certain to arouse the anger of the religious establishment. He publicly challenged the practices of those responsible for the conduct of worship, setting His authority over against theirs. This act of cleansing the temple put on display His role as Messiah, One whose authority surpassed all others.

In Jesus' time the priesthood and the temple were in the hands of the Sadducees. By controlling the temple services, the Sadducees gained great wealth. The pilgrims who came up to Jerusalem three times each year could not bring their sacrifices with them. Instead, they had to buy them in Jerusalem. The priests controlled this sale of animals. Furthermore, the animals could be bought only with using the currency of the temple, so the pilgrims had first to change their money into the temple coinage and then purchase their animals for sacrifice. On both transactions—the money changing and sale of animals—the temple authorities benefited handsomely.

In these ways the temple worship had become corrupted. What should have been a house of prayer for all nations had deteriorated into a money-making scheme that exploited the common people and made the religious leaders rich. No wonder Jesus burned with righteous anger. Words were not enough: He drove out the animals and overturned the tables of the money changers. But by so doing, He sealed His doom. There could be no way now for the religious leaders to tolerate Him any longer. He had touched their wallets, and they would not rest until He was out of the way.

In what ways can we, either as individuals or as a church, turn away from our mission and instead focus only on improving our own lot, yet doing it all under the cover and veneer of truth?

Jesus Curses the Fig Tree (*Mark 11:12-14, 20-26 (see also Matt. 21:18-22, Luke 13:6-9).*

Read the various accounts of this same story. The Life-Giver curses a tree, and then it withers and dies? Why does this seem so out of character for Jesus? What message, what warning, is in there by this action?

Jesus is hungry, sees the fig tree in the distance with leaves, is disappointed when He doesn't find any figs on it, and pronounces a curse upon it. The fig tree subsequently withers and dies. The writers weren't embarrassed by what Jesus did, nor did they try to conceal this apparently strange act. Instead, the Holy Spirit led them to include the account because it had vital teaching for the followers of Jesus to the end of time.

Every word and every deed of Jesus during the last week is freighted with significance. We have already studied His dramatic manner of entry on Sunday and the very public act of clearing the temple. This act was done, not for the general public but for the instruction of His disciples. It was probably early Monday morning when Jesus cursed the fig tree. But something had taken place the previous evening of great significance. Mark does not mention it, but Luke records that Jesus looked on the beloved city and wept over it, foretelling how Jerusalem would be surrounded by foreign armies and broken down (*Luke 19:41-44*). Then, the next morning, Jesus curses the fig tree. The connection should be obvious.

Notice what Jesus says to Peter (*Mark 11:22-26*) after he asks the Lord about the withered tree (vs. 21). How do these words fit in with what Peter said about the tree?

"Have faith in God," Jesus says to them. That is, trust in the Lord, pray to Him, rest in His goodness, and forgive others their sins. Jesus points His followers away from earthly, fallen things to the great principles of truth. What earthly things and earthly principles are you clinging to that, in the end, will shrivel and die like the cursed fig tree? What does Jesus say here that can help you change?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law of the New Kingdom,” “Thy King Cometh,” “A Doomed People,” and “The Temple Cleansed Again,” in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 547–551, 569–600.

Discussion Questions:

- ①** What evidence from this week’s lesson shows that Jesus’ sufferings and death were not just an accident of history?
- ②** How did Jesus directly challenge the religious establishment of His day? Think of other times when He did so, as well. Why do you think He did this? Are there ever times when we, too, should challenge the establishment? If so, when and under what circumstances, and how can we do it in the same spirit that Jesus did?
- ③** As a class, discuss Christ’s words in Mark 11:23–26. Contrast them with what we studied in Sunday’s lesson about prayers that God doesn’t answer as we wish. How can you reconcile the two ideas presented in these sections?
- ④** For those who are willing, talk about prayers asked in faith that have not been answered as hoped for or expected. How have they dealt with this test of faith? What can others in the class share that could help someone struggling with unanswered prayers?

Summary: Our study this week has the ring of high drama. For years Jesus has anticipated this time and prepared for it. With determination He leads the way up to Jerusalem, enters the city in the royal manner foretold by prophecy, and exercises the authority of the Messiah. For the disciples the few days of the week are filled with eager anticipation; for the nation, they are the last, fading opportunities to embrace their King.

Facing the Devil's Wrath

Asav Kumar Valluru

Asav teaches at an Adventist school in India. He was a Christian, but he found Adventists strange. They did not smoke or drink or attend festivals. In time, however, he realized that Adventists teach the truth, and he asked the school staff to hold meetings in his village not far from the school.

He invited his neighbors to come and offered a plot of land for the meetings. During the meetings Asav, his wife, her parents, and 15 other people took their stand for truth. They built a thatched-roof prayer shelter on the land Asav had donated.

Asav's wife operates a small grocery shop in front of their home. One night rats knocked over a kerosene lantern and started a fire that burned Asav's thatched-roof home and his father-in-law's home next door. The families escaped with their lives, but they lost everything.

Asav borrowed 10,000 rupees (about US\$225) to rebuild his home and grocery store and to restock the store. Ten days after they moved back in, a neighbor poured kerosene over himself and lit a match to commit suicide. The ensuing fire burned 30 homes, including Asav's home and store and the believers' prayer shelter. Once more Asav was homeless.

ADRA provided clothes, dishes, and blankets, and the government offered loans and materials to rebuild. Asav and his in-laws built cement houses, which would not burn. He invited the believers to worship in his home. Asav usually preaches, but teachers from the Adventist school help too.

Some villagers said that Asav's troubles came because Asav had left the Sunday church and had stolen away other members to join the Adventist church. Asav remained silent when accused and thought to himself, God will take care of their accusations. I will trust Him.

Soon after the second fire, Asav was asked to teach full time and on a permanent basis at the Adventist school. With his increased salary he has begun to repay part of the loans he took to rebuild.

Asav has started a Branch Sabbath School in a nearby village. He teaches the people songs and Bible stories; he preaches to them and prays for them. The response has been good, and today 20 people worship in that village on Sabbaths. "God has been good to me," Asav says, smiling.

Asav Kumar Valluru teaches Telugu at the Adventist school in Ibrahimpatnam, eastern India.

Last Days *in the Temple*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

CONTROVERSY. Probably all the events of this week's lesson occurred on the final Tuesday of Jesus' earthly life. These were hours of fierce controversy as the religious leaders attempted one time after another to embarrass Jesus publicly or to get Him to say something they could use against Him with the Roman authorities. Here we see various groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians)—normally at odds with one another—united in opposition to Jesus.

In the midst of enemies and controversies, Jesus stands alone. No one comes to His defense, but He does not need anyone, for He answers every trick question with insight and authority that stumps and confounds His accusers. Meanwhile, He takes the initiative against them with probing parables and questions that expose their hypocrisy.

At the end of the long, trying day, Jesus casts a last look around Him and leaves the temple. He will never return to that earthly structure.

The Week at a Glance: How did Christ respond to those who questioned His authority? What was Jesus' message in the parable of the wicked husbandmen? How did Jesus respond to flattery? For Jesus, what was the essence of all true religion and faith?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 11:27–12:44.*

Memory Text: “‘“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment” (*Mark 12:30, NKJV*).

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

“We Cannot Tell”

By cleansing the temple Jesus had clearly set forth Himself as One whose authority was greater than the temple and the chief priests and teachers of the law who served at the temple. It's not surprising, then, that their first challenge to Jesus on this final day in the temple centered around authority. Study Jesus' encounter with His critics (*Mark 11:27-33; see also Matt. 21:23-27 and Luke 20:1-8*). Why didn't the critics answer Jesus' question? Why couldn't they?

Jesus never resorted to verbal trickery. His speech was always open, direct, and pure. In turning the religious leaders' question back on themselves, He was trying to break through the mental barriers they had erected against Him. The answer to His question was the same as the answer to their question. Both Jesus and John the Baptist spoke and worked out of a divine commission; no human agency had given them their task and authorized them. If only the critics could see their own blindness toward John, perhaps their eyes would be open to Him. Jesus, amid such hostility, was, nevertheless, ministering to those who were opposed to Him!

Also, notice their answer to Jesus, “We cannot tell.” *That is, we cannot tell it out loud, for to do so would ultimately expose ourselves to the crowd.* Jesus not only confounded them, He gave them another opportunity to repent, an opportunity that they apparently didn't take advantage of.

Why else could they not answer Jesus' question? See *Mark 1:7, 8; John 1:29.*

What a place Jesus put them in. If they acknowledged that John was from God, then what were they going to do with John's testimony about Jesus? If they acknowledged John's divine credentials, how could they then explain their hostility to Christ?

We mustn't be too quick to judge these critics, though, lest we judge ourselves, as well (*Rom. 2:1*). In what ways, often much more subtle than what appears here, do we try to squirm our way around God's authority in our lives?

The Parable of the Tenants (*Mark 12:1-12*).

This is one of the most powerful parables Jesus ever told. Its application was so direct and its message so terrifying that it must have had a profound effect on all who heard it. Here Jesus clearly foretells His own death and the rejection of the unfaithful in Israel.

What passage from the Old Testament, no doubt familiar to His hearers, did Jesus draw upon in presenting the parable of the wicked tenants? See *Isa. 5:1-7*.

Many of the parables of Jesus teach a single point, and the details do not apply. In this parable, however, we see a clear application for each of the characters and objects.

Keeping in mind *Isaiah 5:1-7*, write down what each of the following in *Mark 12:1-11* represents:

The vineyard:

The householder, owner of the vineyard:

The tenants (“husbandmen” in the King James Version):

The servants sent to collect the fruit:

The owner’s son:

The wall or hedge (Hint: What did God give Israel to set it apart from other people?):

The tower (Hint: What was the most prominent structure in Israel?):

What effect did Jesus’ parable have on the religious leaders? Why didn’t they immediately arrest Jesus? *Mark 12:12*.

These were strong words indeed from the Master. But time was running out—for Him and for Israel. He hoped that this parable with its stern warning might yet cause some hearers to change their course.

Suppose someone came to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and gave the same message to us as Jesus gave to Israel. How would you respond, and why?

Smooth Words (*Mark 12:13-17*).

The next plot against Jesus brought together two groups that normally did not associate with each other. The Pharisees were strict observers of the laws of Judaism—not just what the Lord had given through Moses but the multitude of regulations that had been added by the scribes over the centuries. The Herodians, however, were a political party rather than a religious sect. They supported the royal family, which ruled as puppets of Rome.

What trick did these men try to use on Jesus before asking their question? Who tried the same thing on Him once before? See *John 3:1, 2.*

“For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned,” Jesus had said (*Matt. 12:37*). In this case, these men by their words condemned themselves, because they acknowledged that He was “true” and that He taught the “way of God.” No doubt, unless at some point they repented, these men will meet their words again in the final judgment.

Look up the following texts. What are they all talking about? Why do you think the Bible speaks on this topic as it does? *Pss. 5:9; 12:2, 3; Prov. 20:19; 26:28; 28:23; 29:5.*

The Hebrew word for “flattery” comes from a root word that can mean “smoothness” or “slippery.” How apt a description of this misuse of language! Indeed, flattering words can be used to slip past a person’s defenses and catch them at their weakest point: their ego and sense of self-worth. Though flattery might work with others, those who tried it on Christ get nowhere with this shameful tactic.

Though we all need to be on guard against using flattery to manipulate others, we also need to guard against being duped by it. What was it about Jesus that enabled Him not to fall for this trick? How can we, who no doubt like receiving praise, have the same protection ourselves?

A Trick Question (*Mark 12:18-27*).

The Sadducees were a religio-political party made up of wealthy, liberal, secular-minded people. They accepted only the five books of Moses, Genesis to Deuteronomy, as inspired, and did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Now they came to Jesus with a trick question that they felt sure would embarrass Him. No doubt it was a stock scenario that they had used in arguing with the Pharisees and others against the doctrine of the resurrection (yet, if you really look at their argument, it was kind of ridiculous: a woman who marries seven brothers, one right after the death of the other?). If Jesus disagreed with them, the Sadducees thought they could hold Him up to ridicule; but if He agreed, that would further offend the Pharisees.

Notice Christ's first words to them. He hit them right where it hurt. Why were His words such a rebuke to, of all people, religious leaders?

Because the Sadducees accepted only the books of Moses, Jesus did not quote from other parts of the Old Testament that point to the resurrection, such as Isaiah and Daniel. So far as we know, His reference of Exodus 3:6 is the first time this famous passage was so used. The Sadducees, who considered themselves experts in the first five books of the Bible, suddenly found themselves on the defensive.

Read carefully the verse that Christ quoted. How can we understand this in the context of the power of God and the resurrection of the dead? See also John 11:26; 1 John 5:11, 12. How does Mark 12:27 help answer this question?

In Jesus' own teachings to the people, He made the same point of this argument: Those who believe in Him, such as did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have already crossed over from death to life and will surely come forth from the grave at His call (*John 5:24, 25*). Even though our body turns to dust, we are bound up in the life of God, and we will live again. No wonder, then, for us death is only a sleep, a quiet rest for those whom, though in the grave, God considers as "living."

If someone were to ask you, "Do you know the power of God?" what would you reply, and why?

The Greatest Commandment (*Mark 12:28-34*).

Read carefully and prayerfully Mark 12:28-34. After reading that, read the following quote from Ellen White:

"The wisdom of Christ's answer had convicted the scribe. He knew that the Jewish religion consisted in outward ceremonies rather than inward piety. He had some sense of the worthlessness of mere ceremonial offerings, and the faithless shedding of blood for expiation of sin. Love and obedience to God, and unselfish regard for man, appeared to him of more value than all these rites. The readiness of this man to acknowledge the correctness of Christ's reasoning, and his decided and prompt response before the people, manifested a spirit entirely different from that of the priests and rulers. The heart of Jesus went out in pity to the honest scribe who had dared to face the frowns of the priests and the threats of the rulers to speak the convictions of his heart. 'And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' "—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 608.

Taking what Jesus said, what the scribe said, and what Ellen White said, write what you believe it means for us, today, in the twenty-first century, to love God and love our neighbor. How can we show this love in a practical way? In what ways might we be deceiving ourselves about our so-called "love" for God and our neighbors? What changes might we need to make in our lives that will allow us to better follow these commandments? Share answers with each other in class.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 593–616.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Why is the resurrection of the dead something that we need to take only on faith? Or is there any evidence from the natural world that points to the resurrection of the dead? Do we need any natural evidence in order to believe in it?
- ② Kathryn Cravens once wrote: “If a man is vain, flatter. If timid, flatter. If boastful, flatter. In all history, too much flattery never lost a gentleman.” Why do you think that people are so susceptible to flattery? How can we as Christians be on guard against both giving flattery or being taken in by it?
- ③ When do we cross the line between giving someone valid praise and flattering them?
- ④ Discuss as a class what your church could do, as a church, to show the world that you are a congregation of people who truly love God and love their neighbors. Are you doing anything as a church that would give anyone the idea that you are following those commandments, or is your church nothing more than a Saturday morning social club?
- ⑤ Discuss as a class what Jesus meant by rendering to God what’s God’s and rendering to Caesar what’s his. Think of the historical context in which Jesus made that statement. Why, if He had wanted, could He have justified rebellion against such a corrupt system? Why do you think He didn’t, and what lessons, if any, does that have for us today?

Summary: In this last, drama-filled day in the temple, we find Jesus put on the defensive but always in command of the situation, ever seeking to reach with His love those who hated Him.

The Datu's Dream

Letty Jampit

Datu (chief) Dalangin made it known how he felt about Christians. "The world is full of different religions," he would say. "Everyone claims they have the truth, but who knows which one really does? I will continue to worship spirit gods of my forefathers, the gods who dwell in the woods and give us food to eat so we won't starve."

Sometimes the datu attended the worship in the little Adventist chapel in the village. But he did not go to listen; he went to ridicule. He laughed at the stories we told and disturbed the worship.

So, it was no surprise when the datu and his wife came to worship one Sabbath. But this time they sat quietly in a corner, listening. They were not chewing betel nut as they usually did and made no comments about the songs we sang or the stories we told.

When testimony time came, the datu stood and spoke. "I often have dreams, but I don't see a meaning in them and quickly forget them. But one night recently I had a dream that disturbed me; I have not been able to forget it. That is why I am here today."

"In my dream I saw 24 churches of different sizes and styles standing in the heavens. All the churches were dark except one. A small, humble church was brightly lit, not by candles but by a holy presence, such as the angels we see in the pictures you show us. I asked the angel what church this was and why it was the only one lighted. The angel told me gently, 'This is the Seventh-day Adventist church; it keeps the Sabbath day holy, the day on which your missionary teachers worship. This is the true church that you should join now, before it is too late. Jesus is coming soon.' "

The datu paused a moment then he added, "My wife and I have decided to join this church."

Today Datu Dalangin and his wife and children are preparing for baptism into God's remnant church.



A Manobo Datu (left) Letty Jampit is a student missionary teaching school in the village of Basak in the mountains of southern Philippines.

Predictions *of the End*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

A PEOPLE OF APOCALYPTIC. Seventh-day Adventists are a people of apocalyptic; that is, we believe that this world will not get steadily better but instead will come to a sudden, dramatic end. But it will not be destroyed in atomic warfare, a meteor from outer space, or some other human-made or natural calamity. It will be Jesus who brings about the end of all things. He will return to this earth in power and glory and will bring down the curtain on the present world order. Out of it all and in due time (after the 1,000 years of desolation foretold in Revelation 20), God will make a new heaven and earth for the eternal home of His people.

Our very name, Adventists, proclaims to the world that we believe Jesus is coming again. Indeed, we are Adventists because Jesus was an Adventist. The scripture passage we study this week, along with its parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, gives a sketch, a broad outline of the future, from Jesus' own day until He comes again. And the speaker is Jesus Himself.

The Week at a Glance: What was the context of Christ's discourse on the end of the world? What hope did He offer amid all these troubling words? How well does the world match Christ's predictions about what it would be like prior to His return?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 13:1-36.*

Memory Text: “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations” (*Mark 13:10, NIV*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 4.*

The Disciples' Questions (*Mark 13:1-4*).

What was the setting for Jesus' predictions of the end? (*Mark 13:1-3*).

Matthew records that, as Jesus ended His teaching in the temple, He wept over the beloved city, prophesying: “ ‘Look, your house is left to you desolate’ ” (*Matt. 23:38, NIV*). This remark probably prompted the disciples' comment about the massive foundations and magnificent buildings of the temple as they walked away from it. Even today, when you visit Jerusalem and walk the site of the old temple square, you cannot but be impressed by the size and grandeur of what it had been. Some of the stones of the foundation have been excavated, and they are huge. No wonder the disciples marveled at Jesus' prediction that everything would be thrown down.

Comparing Mark's account with Matthew's (*Matt. 24:1-3*), note carefully the questions of the disciples. The disciples thought they were asking a single question, but Jesus talked not only about the destruction of Jerusalem but about His second coming. Why do you think He linked both events?

To the disciples, it seemed that the events that would lead to the destruction of the temple and city could be so calamitous that they must be those of the end of the world. For them, the fall of Jerusalem would coincide with the return of Jesus to earth. But they were mistaken: Jerusalem indeed would fall and the temple be cast down, but many more years would elapse before Jesus would come back. It is like people traveling across India who see the Himalayas. They think they see the top, but they see only the first ridges. As they climb, they see another ridge beyond and another and another, each rising higher. Far inside the mountain fastnesses, much farther than they imagined, lies the peak, Mount Everest.

The setting of Jesus' words is critical for interpreting His prophecies of the end. His reply encompassed both aspects of the disciples' question—the fall of Jerusalem and His second coming. His answer is comprehensive: Some predictions are specific to the fall of Jerusalem, some to the end of the world, and some apply to both events.

Having pointed with pride to the most glorious structure in their world, as well as the center of their faith, the disciples are then told by Christ that it will become nothing but rubble. What's the spiritual principle here that we need to keep constantly before us in our own lives, as well? See also Job 8:9; Jer. 7:3, 4; James 4:14; 2 Pet. 3:10-12; 1 John 2:16-17.

Signs of the End (*Mark 13:5-13*).

Study Christ's words about the signs leading up to the end of the world. Amid all the violence, persecution, and bloodshed, He nevertheless gives His followers words of encouragement. What are those words, scattered through this discourse, and what kind of hope do they offer to us amid the terrible events that Jesus predicted would take place in the world?

Jesus makes clear that the time of the end will be one of bad news and good news. On one hand, His followers can expect upheavals in the social, political, and natural worlds, with everything out of course and stability a thing of the past. Yet, there will be good news—the gospel, the message of God's love manifested in Jesus, who died for our sins—will be proclaimed to all nations.

Even a hundred years ago the prospect of the gospel going to all nations would have seemed an implausible, if not exactly an impossible, occurrence. What's changed in recent times that now makes the fulfillment of this prediction seem much more likely? What do we have now that previous generations didn't?

As Christians, we, of course, are always pained and dismayed, as are others, over the wars, the natural disasters, and traumas that Jesus said would come. And yet, the fact that He told us about them, and the fact that even amid all this He gives His followers words of encouragement, should help us maintain faith despite the terrible state of the world. This principle is seen through the Old Testament, as well. Prophet after prophet, though warning about destruction, judgment, calamity, and so forth, almost always, amid the warnings, gave words of hope to those who would otherwise have been sorely tempted to give up on God (*2 Chron. 7:13, 14; Jer. 29:10; 36:1-3; Amos 5:4*).

In other words, as you read this discourse, however depressing in one sense it might be, we still have so many reasons to hope.

Amid whatever struggles, traumas, and trials you are now facing, what God-given hope, and promises, are you clinging to that, even amid your suffering, keeps you going? Write out a paragraph focusing only on the hope you have in Christ.

The Fall of Jerusalem (*Mark 13:11–19*).

While several verses in today's passage could apply to followers of Christ in every age, some are specific to the fall of Jerusalem.

What was the specific sign of the imminent end of Jerusalem that Christ's followers were to watch for? (*Mark 13:14; See also Matt. 24:15, Luke 21:20*).

Jesus talked about the “abomination of desolation.” This is a reference to Daniel 9:27, where the prophet is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans many centuries after Daniel was first given the vision. We know this because Jesus Himself, by His words here, shows that this is what it means.

And the Christians took Jesus' words seriously too. As the storm clouds gathered and at last the Roman armies besieged Jerusalem in A.D. 67–70, they were ready. Jesus' warning indicated that when the time came to leave they should do so without delay, and that is what they did. But how could they escape from the city when it was surrounded by foreign soldiers? The Jewish historian Josephus, who lived through the fall of Jerusalem, provides the explanation: “Josephus says (*War vi. 9.3 [420]*) more than one million people perished during and after the siege of the city and 97,000 more were taken captive. However, during a temporary respite, when the Romans unexpectedly raised their siege of Jerusalem, all the Christians fled, and it is said that not one of them lost his life. Their place of retreat was Pella, a city in the foothills east of the Jordan River, about 17 mi. . . . south of the Lake of Galilee.

“According to Josephus, Titus, commander of the Roman armies, confessed that neither his armies nor his siege engines could have been successful in breaching the walls of Jerusalem unless God Himself had so willed it. The stubborn defense of the city so infuriated the Roman soldiers, that when they finally entered, their desire for revenge knew no bounds.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 499.

The siege of Jerusalem was one of the most brutal devastations in all history. Women, children, and babies starved to death. Families murdered each other over every morsel of food, including pigeon droppings. And yet, God knew it all in advance, as shown by both Daniel's and Jesus' prophecy. How would you, as a Christian, explain to a non-Christian how a loving God, knowing what would happen, would let it happen? How do you, in your own mind, reconcile these kind of tragedies with an all-loving, all-powerful God?

The Second Coming (*Mark 13:19-27*).

While we cannot pinpoint every statement in Jesus' predictions in Mark 13 as referring either to the fall of Jerusalem or to the Second Coming, the overall direction of the chapter is clear. After "signs" of a more general nature, He gives specific evidence to indicate the capture of Jerusalem (*vss. 14-18*). Then He moves toward the end of the world in which He gives direct, unambiguous statements concerning the Second Coming (*vss. 26, 27*).

Study *Mark 13:14-27*, bearing in mind that Jesus here has left behind discussion of the fall of Jerusalem. Below, summarize the essence of what Jesus said would take place in the future but prior to His return. Don't focus on the details as much as on the general state of the world.

Compare what you wrote to the state of the world since Christ's words. How well do they match?

Read carefully and prayerfully verse 23. Look what came before it: a depiction of a terrible time, affliction, violence, false christ and false signs, and wonders so deceptive that even the elect were in danger of being deceived. And yet, after this, Jesus basically says, *Look, these terrible things are happening, but don't be discouraged or lose faith, because I am telling you beforehand that it will happen*. Again, even amid such a dire warning, the Lord is giving His people reasons to hope. If anything, because He said these things would happen, they in their own terrible way help prove the truth of what Jesus said (*see also John 13:19*). And we must remember not to focus only on these events but on the event they are all leading up to: the second coming of Christ.

Russian poetess Anna Akhmatova, writing during a terrible crisis in her homeland ("Everything is plundered, betrayed, sold"), nevertheless asked, "Why then do we not despair?" Her answer was: "By day, from the surrounding woods, / cherries blow summer into town; / at night the deep transparent skies / glitter with new galaxies."—*Poems of Akhmatova* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973), p. 73. From what did she derive hope? What do we have as Christians that should give us a greater hope?

Awaiting the Advent (*Mark 13:28-37*).

What lesson does the fig tree teach us? Why can't we know the exact date of Jesus' coming? (vss. 28, 29, 32, 33). Why might it not be good to know the exact time of Christ's return?

Nature itself alerts us to the Second Coming, if we but open our eyes. Every year as the earth puts forth new growth, we know that summer is coming. We don't know just when the hot days will hit, but we can be 100 percent sure that they will come. Even so, the signs of the return of Jesus have been accumulating over the centuries, and we can know that His coming will follow as surely as spring follows winter.

During Ellen White's long ministry, she encountered various attempts to set dates for the Second Coming. She refused to be caught up in any of these speculations, instead instructing Adventists to beware of them. In a sermon preached at Lansing, Michigan, in 1891, she counseled us to give more attention to how we *live* day by day. The sermon, titled "It Is Not for You to Know the Times or the Seasons," was based on Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 and included the following counsel: "We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ. . . .

"We are not to live upon time excitement. We are not to be engrossed with speculations in regard to the times and the seasons which God has not revealed. . . . His followers are to be in the position of those who are listening for the orders of their Captain; they are to watch, wait, pray, and work, as they approach the time for the coming of the Lord; but no one will be able to predict just when that time will come; for 'of that day and hour knoweth no man.' You will not be able to say that He will come in one, two, or five years, neither are you to put off His coming by stating that it may not be for ten or twenty years."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 188, 189.

What key word does Jesus use to describe the attitude we need to have as we wait for His return? (*Mark 13:34-37*).

Jesus' parable of the householder who goes away and leaves servants in charge teaches the lesson as His illustration of the fig tree. The Master's return is absolutely certain, but we cannot know just when. Each day that goes by brings the Second Coming one day closer.

In Jesus' parable, "watching" meant being ready to open the door when the Master returned. What does "watching" mean to us today? What things can cause us to fall "asleep," and how can we avoid them?

FURTHER STUDY: Compare Mark's account of Jesus' Olivet discourse with the parallels in Matthew 24:1-51 and Luke 21:5-36. Read Ellen G. White's "On the Mount of Olives," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 627-636.

In the discourse on the signs leading up to the Second Coming, it's important not to get so caught up in all the gloom and doom that we forget the great hope awaiting us—eternal life in Christ: "No wonder, then, that the New Testament comes laced with promises of eternal life (John 3:16, John 6:54, John 10:28, Luke 18:30, Rom. 6:22, 1 Tim. 1:16, Titus 3:7, 1 John 5:13), for only the eternal guarantees restitution. A million years, even a billion years, might not possess enough good moments to make up for the bad suffered here. Eternity alone can balance all things out, and then some, because the infinite is more than the finite, and always infinitely so."—*Adventist Review*, Feb. 28, 2002, p. 22.

Discussion Questions:

- ① **Read the above quote from the *Adventist Review*. What is the author saying? As a class, discuss the hope it is talking about.**
- ② **Of all the signs of the Advent given in this week's lesson, which one is clearly yet to be fulfilled? What is our role in that fulfillment? What can we as a church or as individuals do to help see it fulfilled? Are we helping, or are we part of the reason we're still here? Justify your answer.**
- ③ **How can we maintain a sense of the imminence of the Second Coming without getting caught up in end-time hysteria?**

Summary: Adventists' emphasis on the Second Coming is not misguided. It originates in Jesus, our Savior and Lord, for whom it was a vital part of truth. Just before the close of His life He gave a long discourse to Peter, Andrew, James, and John, giving them and His followers in all ages a glimpse into the future. That future would bring, first of all, the fall of Jerusalem, but Christians could know when that was near and flee for their lives. After that climactic event, a long period of distress would take place, but the end would come in God's good time.

“Jail Me Instead”

Serafina Ma’alo

Serafina and her husband, Ma’alo, live in Samoa. When they began studying with Adventists, they were amazed to learn that they had believed so much that was not based on the Bible. After Ma’alo gained victory over alcohol and tobacco addictions, the couple, along with his parents, joined the church together.

Ma’alo’s parents lived in a village that had a small congregation of believers. But the group met in a member’s home far from where they lived. Ma’alo’s father wanted to start a Branch Sabbath School closer to his home. But family members have a say in what happens on family property, and Ma’alo’s aunt objected to the family holding religious meetings on the family land.

One evening Ma’alo’s uncle became drunk and began throwing stones and shouting threats at church members. Ma’alo grabbed his uncle to prevent him from hurting anyone. The uncle accused Ma’alo of beating him up and ordered Ma’alo arrested.

Ma’alo had planned to leave the island the next day on a trip. His father begged the police to release his son. “Put me in jail instead,” his father said. The police released Ma’alo and jailed his father so that Ma’alo could leave as planned.

When villagers learned what had happened, they were impressed that Ma’alo’s father would place himself in jail in order to redeem his son who had done no wrong. Villagers began asking questions about God, and in time almost 100 people were baptized into this new congregation. The members built a traditional hall of thatched roof over cleared land, which quickly became too small for the number of people attending worship.

Eventually the village agreed to let the Adventists build a church on Ma’alo’s family property. The church membership continues to grow, even as the village decreases in population.

Serafina’s family moved to her home village, and the couple plan to start another Branch Sabbath School there. “Who knows,” Serafina said, “maybe another church will be born.”



Serafina Ma’alo is a homemaker living in Faeapuna, Samoa.

Betrayed and Arrested



SABBATH AFTERNOON

CLIMAX OF THE AGES. Our final three lessons in Mark's story of Jesus focus on about 72 hours, the crisis point in the life of Jesus.

The next three lessons are locked together. Each contains events and decisions that affect the final outcome. In this week's study we see Jesus wrestling in the Garden of Gethsemane, struggling with the agony of becoming the Sin Bearer for the world. If He turns back, we are eternally lost. Next week we will follow Him to the Cross, where Satan hurls all his assembled schemes in the greatest effort to defeat Him. If Satan succeeds, we are eternally lost. In the final lesson we see Jesus dead, laid in a stone-cold tomb. If His body continues to lie there, all His life and teachings, all His sufferings and death have been in vain—and we are eternally lost. Indeed, the stakes are high.

The Week at a Glance: How did Judas justify his betrayal of Jesus? Why did Jesus say that He would not drink of the “fruit of the vine” until we were in the kingdom of God? Why did Peter deny Christ despite his strong affirmation that he would never do that? What does it mean to call God “Abba”? Why did the disciples all fail Christ so miserably in His climactic hour?

Scripture Passage for the Week: Mark 14:1-51.

Memory Text: “‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will’” (Mark 14:36, NIV).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 11.*

The Betrayal Plot (*Mark 14:1-11*).

Read Mark 14:3-10 along with John 12:1-8; from the two accounts, piece together the best you can why it was after this incident that Judas went and betrayed Jesus.

What's so frightening about the story of Judas is how easily a human being can be deceived into believing that his or her action, no matter how bad, is right.

What was the issue that got some people upset in this account? Was it not, in and of itself, a “valid” point?

In Mark's account, a number of the disciples, not just Judas, were upset about the “waste” of the money. How might the fact that others complained have helped Judas be convinced that his indignation was indeed well-grounded?

It's interesting how Mark 14 begins: The leaders are looking for a way to put Jesus to death. Then, we are given this incident with this woman and Christ's rebuke to those disciples who “had indignation within themselves” over what she did. The next thing we know, Judas goes to the leaders and gives them what they were looking for. (Luke does the same thing but in a different way: see *Luke 22:1-4*.) Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Mark apparently wanted to show the reader how it was this incident that pushed Judas into his terrible betrayal. Notice, too, how the theme of money plays prominently in both Simon's house and with Judas and the leaders. That should tell us something about how the devil (*Luke 22:3*) uses our weak points to gain control of our minds.

We stand horrified at Judas, and yet, none of us are immune to the same principle: that of being swept away by cherished sin until we, too, betray our Lord. What was the only thing that could have saved Judas, and the only thing that can save us? *Mark 8:34. How do we make this real in our lives?*

The Last Supper (*Mark 14:12-26*).

The last meal of Jesus with His disciples has been commemorated by Christians from the beginning of the church. Some twenty years after Jesus sat down with the Twelve on that last Thursday night, the followers of Jesus in Corinth, probably meeting in a house church, gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper (*1 Cor. 11:17-22*). Paul wrote to them to correct abuses that had come into their practices. Today, almost all Christian churches observe the Supper, but the understanding of its meaning varies considerably.

Read *Mark 14:24, 25. What is Jesus saying here? How do you see here a clear reference to the Second Coming? Why would He be talking about the Second Coming at this time, in the context of His own death?*

Look at what Jesus is saying, not just to His disciples but to us, as well. His words reveal the closeness, the bond, the unity He feels with those who will be with Him in “the kingdom of God.” He’s not going to drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God has come (*see Luke 22:18*); that is, until all of us who are saved by this shed blood will be there with Him. “But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (*Matthew 26:29*). In other words, not until we are there to drink with him will He Himself drink. Again, we have to remember who is speaking to us (*John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:2*)—and yet, He views us with such a sense of closeness? What a testimony to God’s love!

Notice, too, how Christ places His shed blood at the center of everything here; it’s only because of that blood that we can one day be with Him in the “kingdom of God” and drink with Him the “fruit of the vine,” symbolic of that blood. How inadequate any theology that lessens the centrality of Christ’s shed blood to the plan of salvation!

Think about what Christ said here about not drinking the fruit of the vine until we are with Him in the kingdom. What kind of comfort, hope, and assurance does that give you? How can this wonderful revelation of God’s character help you through a present discouragement?

Peter's Failure (*Mark 14:27-31, 66-72*).

Jesus foretold that Judas would betray Him (*Mark 14:21*). He also predicted that Peter would deny Him (*vs. 30*). But Judas and Peter were not preordained by God to fail. To God, all things past, present and future are known; He sees what will happen, but that does not negate freedom of choice. Jesus said what He said only because He knew what they would do; if Peter and Judas wouldn't have made those choices, Jesus would not have made those predictions.

How far did Peter feel ready to go in following Jesus? Do you think he meant what he said? (*Mark 14:27-31*).

How like Peter we each are! How quick to affirm, “Although all shall be offended, yet will not I” (*vs. 29*). And Peter meant his words. So do we, as we make promises to God, but often we find ourselves again with Peter, broken, weeping, having failed the Lord. We each have to learn the lesson that Peter learned: to promise does not guarantee victory. We need to learn to look away from our own strength and resources and rely wholly on Christ for victory. If Peter had been quicker to speak of Christ than of himself, the story might have been quite different.

Notice, too, that Peter wasn't the only one who claimed that no matter what, even death, they wouldn't deny Jesus (*vs. 31*). All the disciples made the same affirmation. However, when things really got hot, “they all forsook him, and fled” (*vs. 50*). Though the focus here is particularly on Peter, the others had a lot to learn, as well, about what it meant to follow Christ.

What words might Peter have said, or prayed, that could have revealed an attitude that might have spared him this terrible failure? Use the following texts to help you formulate the words: Ps. 56:1-3; Ps. 119:28; Luke 18:13; 2 Cor. 12:9, 10; Phil. 4:13. How might what you write down help fortify you for whatever temptations and challenges you face?

Abba! (*Mark 14:32-42*).

The Garden of Gethsemane was a favorite place for Jesus. He had often retreated there to find relaxation and respite from the crowds. This night, however, the place of peace became a place of agony.

Ponder the story of Gethsemane, reading and rereading it in the Gospel accounts (*Matt. 26:35-56, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:40-53, and John 18:1-12*). Notice that in His supplication to the Father, Christ used a term of endearment—*Abba*. It suggests deep affection; we could translate it as “Daddy.” Thus, amid the incredible suffering, the sense of separation between Himself and His Father, Jesus still trusted enough in the Father’s love that He would call Him by that term. What a testimony to raw, naked faith amid despondency.

Ellen White describes what Christ was to face on the cross: “Christ was now standing in a different attitude from that in which He had ever stood before. . . . Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself.

“As Christ felt His unity with the Father broken up, He feared that in His human nature He would be unable to endure the coming conflict with the powers of darkness. . . . With the issues of the conflict before Him, Christ’s soul was filled with dread of separation from God. Satan told Him that if He became the surety for a sinful world, the separation would be eternal. He would be identified with Satan’s kingdom, and would nevermore be one with God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 686, 687. And yet, even in anticipation of this, Christ could still cry out “*Abba!*”

Paul tells us that, as disciples of Christ who have been adopted into the family of God, we, too, cry out to our heavenly Father in this term of trust and affection—“*Abba!*” Read Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 (and don’t forget to read them in context). What are they saying? What happened so that we, too, can call God “*Abba?*”

If someone were to ask you, “How can I develop the kind of relationship with God that is described in the above verses?” what would you say?

Jesus Arrested (*Mark 14:43-52*).

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus struggled with the future that the plan of redemption laid out for Him—and accepted it. Not His comfort but the bearing of humanity's sins, not His will but the Father's became His choice.

What was especially despicable about the manner in which Judas betrayed his Master? (*Mark 14:44-46*).

The enemies of Jesus came after Him in the dead of night when the common people would not be present to oppose their efforts. However, they were concerned that the shadows of night might afford an opportunity for Jesus to escape; and once again Judas aided their purposes. Following a prearranged signal, he went ahead of the mob and kissed Jesus. The original text indicates that Judas didn't just give Jesus an embrace, but he kissed Him several times so that Jesus' enemies could move quickly to arrest Him.

But Judas and the mob need not have worried about Jesus' escaping. Jesus had long foreseen this moment, had prepared for "this hour," had made His decision during the preceding struggle in earnest prayer. Jesus made no attempt to escape or resist arrest.

How did the other disciples react when the mob arrested Jesus? (*Mark 14:47-50*). Why did they fail miserably when the test came to them? Was there any reason, given their past performance, to expect anything different from them?

During the Last Supper Jesus had warned the disciples about the coming test. He singled out Peter, warning that Satan intended to make him an object of special attack (*see Luke 22:31-34*). But in the Garden the disciples slept instead of praying. Again Jesus tried to prepare Peter for what was coming (*Mark 14:37, 38*), but His warning went unheeded. When the test came, the disciples at first attempted to meet force with force. Peter's response was to draw his sword and begin flailing about with it (*John 18:10, 11*). He and his companions were not in touch with their Master, whose kingdom is not of this world and who rejected physical force. So, the disciples' feeble, worldly efforts failed, and they all fled.

All through the Gospels, the disciples make one mistake after another; yet, with the exception of Judas, God used them to form the core of the Christian church. What message of hope does this offer you?

Further Study: Study the parallel accounts of Jesus' betrayal and arrest in Matthew 26:1-56, 69-75; Luke 22:1-62; John 13; 18:1-11. Read Ellen G. White's "A Servant of Servants," "In Remembrance of Me," "Gethsemane," and "Judas," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 642-661, 685-697, 716-722.

"The awful moment had come—that moment which was to decide the destiny of the world. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. Christ might even now refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty man. It was not yet too late. . . . Will the Son of God drink the bitter cup of humiliation and agony? Will the innocent suffer the consequences of the curse of sin, to save the guilty? The words fall tremblingly from the pale lips of Jesus, 'O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.'

"Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last, crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world's Redeemer. He sees that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, must perish. He sees the helplessness of man. He sees the power of sin. The woes and lamentation of a doomed world rise before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 690-693.

Discussion Question:

Dwell more on this idea of Christ's not drinking of the fruit of the vine until we are all in the kingdom. What does it tell us about the character of God? Share with the class other examples of this same principle, that of someone not doing something until someone else could do it with them (for example, Uriah's not wanting to spend the night with his wife while his troops were still in battle; see 2 Sam. 11:11). How do these stories illustrate the point that Jesus was making?

Summary: Jesus has come to the last moments of His earthly life before His crucifixion. The plan first thought out in the days of eternity was now coming to fruition. With everyone else failing around Him, Jesus alone stood firm. The fate of the world depended upon it.

“Where Is My Church?”

Adela Amariutzei

Adela was born to Jewish parents in Romania. When she retired she immigrated to Israel, where her children lived. Adela had become an Adventist and quickly began looking for a church. But she did not speak Hebrew and knew few people in Tel Aviv, where she settled. She tried contacting the Adventist field office in Jerusalem, but no one there spoke Romanian.

She asked friends in Romania for the address of an Adventist church in Tel Aviv but could find none. However, they did send her Sabbath School quarterlies when they could. She spent Sabbaths studying her Bible and reading her lesson. Her children were not Adventists and she had few friends, so Adela spent her Sabbaths alone in her little room. Her constant prayer was, “God, where is my church?”

One day while waiting for a bus, Adela met 15-year-old Katalina. Realizing Katalina was a Romanian, Adela did not waste time. “I am an Adventist, and I am looking for the Adventist Church in Tel Aviv,” she said.

Katalina smiled. “I am an Adventist too! We have a church in Tel Aviv! I can tell you where it is. No—” Katalina stopped. “Tomorrow I will come and take you to my family’s house to meet them. Then on Sabbath I will take you to church!”

Katalina kept her promise. She took Adela to meet her family. Adela was so excited to meet fellow Adventists that she could hardly stop talking. “I have been here for so many years and did not know where to find the church! This is wonderful!”

On Sabbath Katalina took Adela to her first worship with fellow Romanian Adventists in Israel. During church Adela shared her story of years of loneliness, praying to find fellow believers. Adela learned that Romanian Adventists did not own a place to worship. The church moved from one rented building to another when a landlord or the neighbors objected to Adventists meeting in the area. It was difficult to let people know where the church was located.

Today the church rents a large hall in a good building. But the congregation is growing, and members want to open a second church closer to where Adela lives. Now that Adela has found her church, she is working to win others to Christ, the Messiah.

Adela Amariutzei lives in a small apartment in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Tried *and* Crucified



SABBATH AFTERNOON

ALL ROADS LEAD TO CALVARY. We have traced the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they inevitably lead to Calvary, His place of rejection, shame, suffering, and death; but to our place of victory, hope, and eternal life.

Calvary, and what followed, sets Jesus of Nazareth apart from all other religious teachers the world has known. Others left wise teachings, did kind deeds, gathered a band of followers, and became the center of movements that persisted and grew after their deaths, some into world religions. But only Jesus, after His death, was resurrected and reigns as a living Savior. And that difference makes all the difference in the world.

The Week at a Glance: What reasons did the high priests think they had for putting Jesus to death? How did they influence Pilate? What was the significance of Jesus' being crucified between two thieves? How central is the idea of substitution in understanding the death of Jesus? What happened to the Godhead at the Cross?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 14:53-65, 15:1-41.*

Memory Verse: “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (*Mark 15:34*).

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 18.

Before the Sanhedrin (*Mark 14:53-65*).

The trials of Jesus were a farce. They were not intended to impartially examine the evidence but to trump up charges that would result in Jesus' condemnation and death. The religious leaders had reached their decision before any trial began: They wanted Jesus dead. While they attempted to maintain the appearance of legality, the whole process—a hastily called “court” in the middle of the night—made a mockery of justice.

By piecing together the accounts of Jesus’ trials in the four Gospels and additional comments by Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary* concludes the following: Jesus was given two preliminary hearings, one before Annas alone and another before Annas and Caiaphas. He was arraigned twice before the Sanhedrin, first by night and then by day. Jesus appeared twice before Pilate and once before Herod, between the two appearances before Pilate (see vol. 5, p. 528).

As you read this account in Mark, put yourself in the place of the high priest. Why would he want Jesus dead? How could he have “justified” his own course? After the texts, write out what “justification” he believed that he had.

Matthew 12:2

Matthew 12:24

Mark 14:62-64

Luke 4:22

John 2:19

John 7:41, 42

John 10:33

John 11:48

We’re often astonished, and rightly so, at the blindness of the leaders in their attitude toward Jesus. Yet, after summarizing in your own mind their rationale from the above texts, can you see how easy it was, even despite the evidence, for them to do what they did? What lessons might there be here for us, we who also have a capacity for justifying whatever we do, as well?

Pilate and the Religious Leaders (*Mark 15:1-19*).

Study the accounts of Jesus before Pilate in Mark 15:1-15 and the other Gospels (*Matt. 27:11-26, Luke 22:66–23:25, John 18:28–19:1-16*). How incredible that a pagan ruler was trying to save Jesus while the religious leaders, supposedly the guardians of the faith, wanted Him dead. How incredible that Jesus would be called “King of the Jews” by a pagan ruler and his soldiers while His own people, who long professed to be waiting for Him, shouted, “Crucify Him!” How incredible that Pilate offered to release Jesus, the Life-Giver, and the crowd wanted Barabbas, a murderer, instead. What a frightening testimony to the power of Satan to deceive hearts that are not surrendered completely to the Lord.

Who was more guilty in the eyes of God, Pilate or the religious leaders? What justification do you have for your answer? See *John 19:11*.

Religion can be a powerful tool either for good or evil. In this account, we see it used for a terribly evil purpose. When people, like the religious leaders here, do things under the idea that they are doing it for God, what can stop them? The notion that one’s actions are being done under a divine impetus can lead one to do a whole host of things that, otherwise, would not be done. After all, if God is leading someone, who or what should be allowed to stand in the way?

We never sin in a vacuum, do we? That is, our sins never just impact ourselves. Reread the account for today. Who else was impacted in a very negative way because of what the religious leaders did? What’s the message for us here? What other examples can you find in the Bible of how quickly the influence of sin can spread to hurt others?

Put yourself in the place of Pilate during the final judgment (*Eccles. 12:14, Rom. 3:6*). What kind of arguments might he try to use to justify his actions? How many times in the last month or so have you used the same principle to justify your own wrong acts or words?

Golgotha (*Mark 15:16-37*).

Of all the scenes from the life of Jesus, this is the one that most demands our prayerful contemplation. See Him hanging on the cross, bruised, bowed, and bloody, God's only begotten Son. His back is lacerated, His hands and feet pierced with nails. All night He has been up; He has had neither food nor drink since the meal the night before. Now He hangs helpless, skewered between felons, exposed to sun and wind, flies and ants.

Read carefully *Mark 15:27, 28*. What significance do you find in the fact that not only was Jesus crucified as a common criminal, but that he was placed there amid two criminals? How does the Old Testament text (*Isa. 53:12*) quoted there by Mark help answer that question? What point is being forced home here to us about what happened to Jesus on the cross?

At the Cross, Christ became our Sin Bearer. That is, He became so closely associated with sin that, according to Paul, God "for our sake . . . made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (*2 Cor. 5:21, RSV*). Without quite saying that Jesus was a sinner, which would have, of course, been wrong, Paul came as close as he possibly could, instead bringing out the idea that God regarded Him as a sinner, a transgressor, and thus treated Him as such. In a way that we can barely understand, Jesus—the only One who never sinned—took the place of every sinner.

Read *John 1:29, Galatians 3:13, Hebrews 9:28, and 1 Peter 2:24*. What are they saying that helps us understand the relationship between Jesus and sin at the Cross?

How should the realization of what sin did to the Son of God motivate you to seek His power in overcoming sin?

The Meaning of Calvary (*Isaiah 53*).

In the texts we looked at yesterday, Mark quoted from *Isaiah 53*. Read that chapter and list the phrases that explicitly suggest that “Christ died for our sins”—that is, in our place (see *Isa. 53:4-12*).

In what ways can you see the idea of “substitution,” that Jesus died in our stead? Why is this so important for understanding the plan of salvation?

Christians have tried to explain just how God in Christ provides the way of salvation. They have set forth the various theories of the atonement. Some explanations or suggestions are as follows. How do they work, or not work, for you?

1. The Father was reluctant to save humanity, but Christ’s love provided the answer.
2. Christ’s death was a ransom price paid for the devil to free humanity from his clutches.
3. God’s honor was offended by sin, and Christ had to die to satisfy that offended honor.
4. Christ had to die as an example to the rest of the universe of the effects of sin.
5. Christ died in order to manifest God’s love so that we might be softened and won to Him.
6. On the cross the Father was punishing the Son.

No one theory is sufficient to explain how God provides a way of salvation in Jesus Christ. Many of the various “explanations” worked out—sometimes in great detail—by Christian thinkers over the centuries contain elements of truth, but the full story is much greater. The answer lies in God, who Himself provides the atonement. Note the following truths set forth in the Bible.

1. In the plan of salvation, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One in love and action. We must avoid portraying the Father as cruel or merciless and the Son as merciful by contrast. (*See John 3:16*.)
2. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself (*2 Cor. 5:19*).
3. The death was necessary (*Rom. 3:24-26, Heb. 9:22*).
4. Christ died in our place (*2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Cor. 15:3*).
5. The Cross is the supreme evidence of divine love (*Rom. 5:7, 8*).

The Death of Jesus (*Mark 15:33-41*).

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (*Mark 15:34*).

“Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father’s acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father’s wrath upon Him as man’s substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

Dwell on this Ellen White quote. How does it help us understand what happened at the Cross? What does it tell us about the character of sin? Of God? How does it help us understand what our salvation cost God?

Although Jesus tapped the depths of despair in His cry of woe—“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”—His final words, “It is finished” (*John 19:30*), expressed confidence, hope, and trust anyway. He declared that He had won the last decisive battle with Satan; the outcome of the great controversy with evil was assured. The war isn’t over yet, but we know how it will end, because Jesus won the victory on Calvary. Finally, commanding Himself into the Father’s keeping, Jesus bowed His head and died.

Think about it. Jesus was One with the Father from eternity (*John 1:1, 2*); He and the Father were One in unity, action, and purpose (*Gen. 1:26, 3:22, John 10:30*); and yet, there, at the cross, Jesus felt this overwhelming sense of separation because of sin! There was a sundering of the Godhead itself there at Calvary! Have you ever been separated from someone that you love and feel very close to? How did that separation make you feel? How could those experiences, in a small way, not only help you appreciate what Jesus did for us but also help you live in loving obedience to the God who went through all this for you?

FURTHER STUDY: Compare the parallel accounts in Matthew 26:57-68; 27:1-56; Luke 22:66-23:49; John 18:12-14, 19-19:37. Read Ellen G. White's "Before Annas and the Court of Caiaphas," "In Pilate's Judgment Hall," "Calvary," and "It is Finished," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 698-715, 723-764.

"The Captain of our salvation was perfected through suffering. His soul was made an offering for sin. It was necessary for the awful darkness to gather about His soul because of the withdrawal of the Father's love and favor; for He was standing in the sinner's place, and this darkness every sinner must experience. The righteous One must suffer the condemnation and wrath of God, not in vindictiveness; for the heart of God yearned with greatest sorrow when His Son, the guiltless, was suffering the penalty of sin. This sundering of the divine powers will never again occur throughout the eternal ages."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 924.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Write out a small narrative, putting yourself in the place of Caiaphas. Justify why you had to have Jesus put to death. Bring it to class and have members read their accounts and then discuss whatever you can learn from this exercise.
- ② Why did Jesus have to die in order to save us?
- ③ As a class, discuss the implication of the statement: "The whole purpose of the Cross was merely to help us learn to trust God." Why do you agree or disagree with it?
- ④ What could you do, as a church, to be more Cross-centered? How can you make sure that when people think of your church, they first and foremost think of a community whose individual lives have been changed by Christ's death on the cross?

Summary: Christ died for our sins. Only as we see ourselves at Calvary—see and confess that Jesus died for me, in my place—does the Cross reach us with its full import. "If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

What Changed Michael?

Ohemaa Akyaa Archin

"Michael. . . . Michael!"* Mother called.

"I'll be with you in a minute, Mum!" Michael called back. "I'm having quiet time."

"What?" Mother said, surprised. Michael had avoided family worship and hadn't read his Bible in months. Mother decided to go see what he was really doing. She peeked through the half-open door.

She saw Michael sitting on his bed reading his Bible. Then she noticed that the posters of rap stars were gone. In their place was a large picture of Jesus with a message under it that read, "I love you for saving my life. I will serve you forever."

Mother quietly walked to where her husband sat and shared what she had seen. A few minutes later Michael came into the room. His hair was combed, he was neatly dressed, and he smiled.

Michael was the eldest son in an Adventist family in Ghana, West Africa. He was outgoing and much loved. He grew into a strikingly handsome teenager. But when he entered senior high school, something happened to him. This once obedient son became disobedient. He no longer came when he was called, no longer willingly took part in family worship or church activities. He smoked, hung out with the wrong crowd at school, and worried his parents to tears. His behavior became so bad that his parents worried about his influence on the younger children. They prayed daily for their wayward son.

When December break approached, the young people in the church began talking about the upcoming youth camp. As the time drew near, more and more young people talked enthusiastically about youth camp, and to Michael's parents' surprise, Michael decided to go. Even the youth leader wondered whether it was a good idea to let Michael go. Would the other children be influenced by his behavior?

The youth arrived at camp and were assigned their housing. The days were so packed with activities that there was no time for mischief. Michael

took part in the games, the singing times, and he even listened during lectures. "No matter who you are or how sinful you have been," the speaker said, "God can wash you clean and pure." During the call of dedication, Michael gave his life back to God. Michael returned home a changed boy, and the change lasted.

* Michael is not his real name.



Ohemaa Akyaa Archin (left) is a student at the University of Ghana majoring in psychology.

Buried—But Risen!



SABBATH AFTERNOON

A TOMB UNIQUE: Some of the most famous structures on this earth are tombs. Consider the great pyramid of Egypt: 100,000 men are supposed to have worked for 20 years to build it. To this day we do not know how the 23 million massive stone blocks, weighing an average of two and one half tons, were set in place. But the great pyramid, like the others in its class, was built out of a concern for death. It provided burial chambers for the Pharaoh; it is a monument to death. So is the beautiful Taj Mahal of India, built by Shah Jahan for his favorite wife, Mumtaz. With its gleaming white marble, inlaid precious stones, gardens, and reflecting pools, the Taj Mahal indeed is a magnificent monument. Inside the Taj Mahal repose the bodies of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz. How different is the story that we celebrate in this week's lesson. The simple, rock-cut garden tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, the tomb where Jesus was laid, is more wonderful than the pyramid of Cheops or the Taj Mahal. And that's because—His tomb is empty!

The Week at a Glance: Why is it important to know that Jesus truly died on the cross? Who were the first ones to know that Christ had risen? What is the evidence that He rose from the dead? How do the arguments against the Resurrection used by skeptics fail?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 15:42–16:20.*

Memory Verse: “‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said.‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him’ ” (*Mark 16:6, NIV*).

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 25.

“He Was Buried” (*Mark 15:42-47*).

The Scriptures had predicted that God’s servant would make “his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (*Isa. 53:9, NIV*). Jesus was a poor man who owned only one item of value—the seamless tunic for which the Roman soldiers gambled (*John 19:23, 24*). It seemed highly unlikely that He would be buried in a rich person’s tomb, but so it turned out. Two members of the Sanhedrin, the highest council of the Jews, came forward after Jesus’ death to publicly identify themselves with Jesus. Mark mentions Joseph of Arimathea, but John’s Gospel tells us that Nicodemus—he who had secretly talked with Jesus under cover of night—accompanied Joseph (*John 19:38-42*).

In 1 Corinthians 15:3,4 Paul quotes an early formulation of the gospel. This statement includes the words “he was buried.” Why was it important to the first Christians to include this fact?

The New Testament throbs with the certainty that Jesus rose from the dead. Throughout the book of Acts the preaching of the apostles comes back to two ringing affirmations: Christ is risen, and He has poured out the Holy Spirit. So, the formulation of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3 ties together three facts: 1. Christ died for our sins. 2. He was buried. 3. He rose again.

Thus, the burial of Jesus is not a minor matter. It underlines the truth that He truly died—did not merely faint or swoon (as some critics and skeptics have suggested)—and thus makes the resurrection a glorious miracle. Only in the context of His death can we understand the importance of His resurrection.

Read the following texts. What common point are they all emphasizing, and is that important to our faith? *Lev. 17:11, Matt. 26:28, John 19:40, Rom. 5:6-8, 6:4, 1 Cor. 5:7*.

The Bible is clear: Christ died for our sins, and His death is a crucial component for the plan of salvation. Without it, there would be no atonement, no redemption, no eternal life for those who, otherwise, would be forever lost. That’s how crucial His death is to us and to our hope for the future. It’s His death that helps guarantee the final annulment of ours.

He Is Risen! (*Mark 16:1-11*).

Who were the first people to be told that Jesus had risen from the dead? What effect did the empty tomb have on them? (*Mark 16:1-8*).

In Jesus' time women had a lower status in society, but not before God. Mark singles out the women who ministered to Jesus, first in Galilee and then in Jerusalem. They stood looking on the cross as He died; they were not ashamed to be identified with Him (*Mark 15:40, 41*). Some of these women bought spices to anoint His body and came early on Sunday morning to the tomb for this purpose. These devoted followers became the first to hear the incredible news that Jesus had risen from the dead.

For many scholars the fact that women were the first to see Jesus helps affirm the authenticity of the accounts. If they wanted to make up the story, why have not some powerful religious or political leader in Palestine, as opposed to a few "lowly" and "unimportant" women of no real social class, first taken notice of the empty tomb? Would not that have been a more powerful way of making their point?

Note, too, how the effect on the women of the news of the resurrection of Jesus corresponded with the impression made by Jesus throughout the Gospel of Mark. Over and over we have seen how people were amazed at His miracles and teaching. Now came the crowning miracle, the supreme proof that He was what He claimed to be. Although the women did not yet understand fully, the sight of the empty tomb filled them with wonderment.

To whom did the risen Lord first appear? Again, how does this help affirm the authenticity of their accounts of Jesus? (*Mark 16:9-11, John 20:1-18*).

As women were the first to be informed of the Resurrection, so it was to a woman that Jesus first appeared. And what a woman! According to the views of many people, her past excluded her from polite company. But she who had been forgiven much loved much; thus it is not surprising that Mary Magdalene was first at the tomb that Sunday morning. And to her, Jesus chose to reveal Himself.

We are all, to some degree, impacted by the social prejudices against certain people. Which ones poison your soul? From what you've seen today (women of no great class being the first ones privileged with the news of a risen Savior), how do you think God views those prejudices, and what can you do through God's grace to be purged of this unholy and un-Christian attitude?

Appearances of the Risen Lord (*Mark 16:12-18*).

Jesus appeared not only to people who feature prominently in the Gospel account but also to some about whom we would know nothing had He not chosen to reveal Himself to them. In this regard we see another instance of Jesus' interest in all His disciples, whether or not they were leaders or well known.

To whom did Jesus appear as they were walking along the road? (*Mark 16:12, 13*). Study the extended story in *Luke 24:13-32*. What lessons can you learn from it?

To whom else did Jesus reveal Himself as the risen Lord? (*Matt. 28:16, 17; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:33-49; John 20:19-29; 21:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:4-8*).

Each Gospel writer supplies information about the appearances of the risen Christ that the others do not. The four accounts, however, confirm that Jesus truly rose from the dead. Differences in some details are minor and consistent with what might be expected from eyewitness accounts. While we probably cannot be sure as to the exact order of events, we may be confident of the following list of appearances of the risen Lord:

1. To Mary Magdalene (*Mark 16:9, John 20:15-17*).
2. To the other women after they had left the tomb (*Matt. 28:9, 10*).
3. To Peter prior to the walk to Emmaus (*Luke 24:34, 1 Cor. 15:5*).
4. To two disciples on the way to Emmaus (*Mark 16:12, Luke 24:13-32*).
5. To the disciples in the upper room (*Mark 16:14, John 20:19-24*. But Thomas was not present.

Additional appearances after the Resurrection day:

6. To the eleven, Thomas being present, in the upper room a week later (*John 20:26-29*).
7. To seven of the disciples as they were fishing on Lake Galilee (*John 21:1-3*).
8. To about five hundred (*1 Cor. 15:6*).
9. To James (*1 Cor. 15:7*).
10. To the eleven immediately prior to the Ascension (*Mark 16:19, 20; Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:4-12*).

Notice the variety of the appearances of Jesus. What does this suggest about the certainty of His resurrection? What does this tell us about the evidence God has given to us for belief? How do these accounts help strengthen your faith in the whole plan of Salvation?

The Crowning Miracle

What was the earliest attempt to refute the Resurrection? (*Matt. 28:11-15*). What answer would you give to those who bring it up today?

As we studied in last week's lesson, the religious leaders took steps to see that Jesus' disciples would not be able to steal the body. With Pilate's permission they sealed the tomb and posted a guard (*Matt. 27:62-66*).

How did this attempt to prevent the Resurrection only strengthen the evidence for it?

During the course of the centuries, other "explanations" have been advanced to explain the empty tomb, such as (1) Jesus did not die on the cross; He merely swooned and later revived in the coolness of the tomb; and (2) His "appearances" to the disciples did not actually happen—the disciples longed so badly for Him to rise again that they imagined they saw Him risen from the dead. This psychological explanation is a "wish-fulfillment" theory, because it argues that the disciples' wish led to fulfillment of their hopes.

What evidence of Scripture disproves the theory that Jesus did not really die? (*John 19:31-35*). How might you defend the Resurrection with someone who argues that the disciples only imagined that He came back to life? (*Acts 1:3, 4*).

The Gospel accounts of the Resurrection repeatedly emphasize that the disciples' frame of mind was just the opposite of that demanded by the "wish-fulfillment" theory. Jesus' followers did not expect Him to rise again, and they did not believe those who brought reports of His resurrection (see *Matt. 28:17; Mark 16:11, 13; Luke 24:11; John 20:24-29*).

Two great facts help refute all attempts to explain away the resurrection of Jesus. First, the body of Jesus disappeared; something happened to it, despite the tomb's being sealed and a guard in place. The easiest way for Jesus' enemies to debunk the new religion would have been to point to Jesus' corpse—but they could not. Second, after Calvary, the disciples were broken and dispirited. After His resurrection, they were filled with confidence and power and went out in the name of Jesus. What made the difference? They had seen the risen Lord.

Why is Christ's resurrection so important to you?

The Commission (*Mark 16:15-20*).

We have been referring to the “appearances” of the risen Lord, but that term is inadequate to describe what happened. Jesus not only was seen, He spoke, answered questions, even ate with the disciples. These were meetings with His followers rather than appearances.

Over how long a period did these meetings of the resurrected Jesus and His followers take place? (*Acts 1:3*).

Think about how long that time is. How did this time help strengthen them for their mission?

According to Mark (*16:14*), even after the Resurrection Jesus had to “upbraid” them for their unbelief and hardness of heart toward those who had first reported His resurrection. The Greek verb means more literally “to reproach” or “to disparage”; that is, He had to speak firmly to them for their doubts. How little humanity has changed! Probably every one of us could give accounts of how God has worked marvelously in our lives, only to have us a short time later manifesting “unbelief and hardness of heart.”

According to Mark, what commission did Jesus give to His disciples? How does that commission parallel what we as Adventists believe is our commission? See Rev. 14:6.

The last two verses of the book of Mark present an interesting contrast. Jesus has now ascended to the Father in heaven, sitting down at the “right hand of God,” a phrase that means His position of authority. And yet, at the same time, the texts talk about “the Lord” working with His church, “confirming the word with signs and wonders.” In other words, though up in heaven, through His power and authority Jesus is still close to His church, close to His people, giving them what they need, to do what He asks of them. Those words should have been a comfort to the early church, just as they should be to us now.

Notice the phrase “confirming the word.” How has God confirmed “the word” in your own life and experience? Share with the class how He has done that for you. It would be interesting to compare accounts. What can you learn from one another’s experiences?

Further Study: Study again Mark 15:42–16:20, along with the parallel accounts in Matthew 27:57–28:20, Luke 23:50–24:52, and John 19:38–21:25. Read Ellen G. White's "In Joseph's Tomb"; "The Lord Is Risen"; "Why Weepest Thou?"; "The Walk to Emmaus"; "Peace Be Unto You"; "By the Sea Once More"; "Go Teach All Nations"; and "To My Father and Your Father"; in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 769–835.

Discussion Questions:

- ① We're given a great deal of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, evidence that should strengthen our faith. What other evidence have we been given that helps "prove" the truth of Christianity? How much evidence do we ultimately need? If we have evidence, why then the need for faith? Discuss in class.
- ② Christianity would seem to have a most unpromising foundation for a world religion—a founder who died young and whose work was rejected by much of the prevailing religious establishment. Nevertheless, it is the world's greatest religion, and Jesus is the most influential Person who has ever lived. Why?
- ③ Mark 16:19 talks about Jesus up in heaven. What other verses talk about Him there? What do they tell us that He's doing in heaven, now that His earthly work is over?
- ④ How well is your church fulfilling the commission that Jesus gave at the end of Mark? What can you do, personally, or as a church, to be more involved in this divine commission?

Summary: What a close to this fast-moving, action-packed account. The greatest miracle, the most incredible act comes at the end of the story. His enemies crucify Jesus, and He is buried, but He comes back to life. As the risen Lord, He has all power and all authority, over all the earth, to the end of the age. And we, His followers, carry on His work as we eagerly await His return.

Finding God in the Qur'an

J. H. Zachary

Amin picked up his Bible and his Qur'an and went to visit an Adventist pastor. "Pastor, I have spent a lot of time studying these two books. After reading a Protestant pamphlet describing the salvation that comes to sinners through Jesus' death on the cross, I took a series of Bible studies and was baptized."

"The more I have compared the Bible and the Qur'an the more discouraged I have become. The Bible clearly teaches about clean foods and the seventh-day Sabbath. My church friends worship on Sunday and eat pork."

"Why did you come to me?" the pastor asked.

"A friend told me that I should go to the Adventist church if I wanted to find someone who follows the Bible's teachings."

Amin told the pastor how his family and neighbors forsook him after he became a Christian. His family disowned him, took away his portion of the family land, and cut him off from sources of cash. Now he wondered whether he had done the right thing to become a Christian.

The pastor spoke with Amin at length about God's plan of salvation, God's laws, and the grace of Jesus that saves sinners. Amin began studying the Bible with the pastor. For a year they met together and discussed what the Bible really said. Then one day Amin told the pastor that he was convinced that Adventist Christians follow God's teachings. He asked the pastor to rebaptize him, this time into the Adventist Church.

Amin shared the good news of salvation with others. "I now understand how anyone can know that God has forgiven him, how we can know we are saved. Because of Jesus, I know I am ready to meet Jesus in the final judgment. Jesus is my Savior, my Lord, and my Judge. He has given me assurance that I am accepted into His family and one day will live with Him in heaven," he testified.

Village friends who once rejected Amin now listened to his enthusiastic testimony. Amin showed them basic truths about God from the Bible and the Qur'an. Before long Amin had organized a small group of believers. He taught them how to share the good news about forgiveness and salvation through Jesus, and the Sabbath. Today a group of 50 believers meets in Amin's village.

J. H. Zachary is a coordinator for outreach among the Muslim and Jewish populations in North America. Amin continues to witness in an unnamed country in the Middle East.

The topic for third quarter's study is experiencing Jesus Christ as Lord by Derek Morris. In this set of lessons we will consider what it means to experience Jesus Christ as Lord in every aspect of our existence.

Lesson 1—Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Our Need for a Savior (*Rom. 3:9-26*).

MONDAY: Heaven's Greatest Gift (*Luke 1:26-38, John 1:1-18*).

TUESDAY: God's Perfect Plan (*Isa. 53:3-7*).

WEDNESDAY: Responding to God's Grace (*1 Cor. 1:18-31*).

THURSDAY: Confessing Jesus Christ as Lord (*Acts 9:1-19*).

Memory Text—Luke 2:10, 11, NKJV

Sabbath Gem: This week we'll explore both the importance and the consequences of the crucial question: Have you received Jesus both as Savior and Lord?

Lesson 2—Lord of Our Priorities

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Earth Is the Lord's (*Gen. 1:1*).

MONDAY: Redeemer God (*Isa. 44:22*).

TUESDAY: The Example of the Lord Jesus Christ (*John 4:34*).

WEDNESDAY: First on Your Agenda (*Luke 6:46*).

THURSDAY: First in Your Day (*Mark 1:35, Ps. 5:1-3*).

Memory Text—Matthew 6:33, NKJV.

Sabbath Gem: Jesus asks us to give Him unrivaled first place in our lives.

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.

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