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The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of the Sabbath School Publications Board, a subcommittee of the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM), publisher of the Bible study guides. The published guide reflects the input of worldwide evaluation committees and the approval of the Sabbath School Publications Board and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).
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 a different time 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, John focuses on His conversations one on one with a variety of people, and 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.
How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the standard Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

▶ **Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline:** The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to (a) help class participants understand and know about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate feeling about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants apply the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.

▶ **The Commentary** follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.

▶ **The Inductive Bible-Study Method** emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner’s investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly, understand the passage in context, avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.

▶ **The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach** should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.

▶ **The Life-Application Approach** demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it often is possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.
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?**
Key Text: *Mark 1:1*

Teachers Aims:

1. To establish the fact that each of the Gospels plays a unique part in revealing Christ’s character.
2. To understand why Mark introduced Christ as he did.
3. To demonstrate how Mark reveals Jesus as the Son of God.

Lesson Outline:

I. Author and Authorship *(Acts 15:37-39).*
   A. Although the book of Mark does not name its author, the traditions that say it is the historical person of Mark are reliable.
   B. Mark is an example of someone whose character Christ transformed.
   C. The fact that Mark wrote his Gospel is an indication of God’s grace.

II. Christ’s Early Life and Ministry *(Mark 1:9-11).*
   A. The beginning of Mark is abrupt. It includes no nativity story.
   B. Most of the information Mark presents concerns Christ’s Sonship.

III. Christ’s Message and Ministry *(Mark 1:14, 15).*
   A. The Jesus presented by Mark is a Messianic figure.
   B. Mark presents Jesus’ message as prophetic and apocalyptic.
   C. Mark portrays Jesus as fulfilling the time prophecies of Daniel.

Summary: While the four Gospels tell essentially the same story, they tell it in different ways to different audiences. A close examination of the Gospels leads us to the conclusion that they complement rather than contradict one another. The Gospel of Mark is notable for the succinct manner in which it presents the essentials of Jesus’ ministry and message.

COMMENTARY

Mark generally is accepted by scholars as the first Gospel to have been written. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the synoptic Gospels. Synoptic means “to see together,” indicating the three Gospels have much in common. A comparison of them shows that Mark is an important source from “which Matthew and Luke drew in composing their accounts of Jesus.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 178. For example, of Mark’s 661 verses, Matthew utilizes 606, and Luke uses 320 (see William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* [Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1977], p. 2).

Mark’s key text could well be 10:45: “‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’” *(NKJV)*. Service and sacrifice define the ministry
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?
of Mark’s Jesus. Mark records more miracles than any other Gospel and devotes nearly half his writing to the Passion Week.

This week’s lesson presents the nature of the gospel, the preparation for the gospel, and the beginning of Christ’s ministry.


Mark makes it clear that the gospel is not of human making. The good news of salvation can neither originate in, nor be made effective by, human thought or effort. The gospel is and always shall be that of “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). Its origin goes back to eternity and the throne room of God. Before sin raised its ugly head on earth, before the foundation of the world was laid (1 Pet. 1:20, Rev. 13:8), the Godhead conceived a plan to deal with sin. This plan is for the Son of God to become the “Son of Man . . . to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45, NKJV). Christ’s divinity makes the gospel effective. His humanity makes it possible.

II. The Gospel: Preparing the Way.

Although God’s plan had to await the Incarnation, He did not leave His people in darkness. The Old Testament is a series of promises revealed through the covenant, the sanctuary system, and the prophets. The Old Testament, then, is the anticipation of the good news of salvation; the New Testament is the fulfillment.

Mark identifies this continuity between the Old and the New Testaments in the ministry of John the Baptist, whose mission strides across the promises and their fulfillment. Foretold by Isaiah and Malachi (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; Mark 1:2, 3) and prepared by God’s Spirit, John became the forerunner of the Savior. He was the paver of the road, and the paving involved calling sinners to repentance and baptizing them in anticipation of the soon coming of the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:4-8). To prepare the way for the Savior’s work is still life’s highest calling.


Mark begins Jesus’ ministry with His baptism. Jesus did not need to be baptized. Rather, He did so to identify “Himself with sinners, taking the steps that we are to take, and doing the work that we must do.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 111. Jesus saw this identification with humanity as necessary for the fulfillment of His work on the cross—“a baptism to be baptized with” (Luke 12:50; see also Rom. 6:1-4).

Baptism also was important to Jesus, because at His baptism He was affirmed as an equal part of the Trinity. The Father’s voice from heaven and the seal of the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:9-11) left no doubt on earth or in heaven that, as a member of the Godhead, Christ is the Gospel—the only way to salvation.
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?**
Hell’s fury immediately followed Heaven’s approval, as Satan attacked Jesus after He spent 40 days in the wilderness (vss. 12, 13). The closer one is to God, the stronger the enemy’s attack. But Jesus showed that to be victorious is to rely on God’s promises (see Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

Having been divinely commissioned, Jesus began His ministry with this historic announcement, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15; see also Gal. 4:4). God works according to His own schedule; and the strikes of the heavenly clock produce inevitable action. God knows neither haste nor delay.

The kingdom Jesus preached about involves both a call and a fel-

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery: Mark 1:1-20**

1. The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were written by different individuals with different audiences in mind. Which is your favorite? What makes it your favorite? How is your choice a reflection of you and your Christian experience?

2. The first sentence of Mark’s Gospel begins by claiming that Jesus Christ is “the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). The rest of the book is dedicated to showing how, by word and deed, Jesus demonstrated His divinity. What evidence in your life indicates Jesus is the Son of God and your life has been touched by His power?

3. The ministry of John the Baptist is a type of the ministry God’s people will assume before Jesus returns (Mark 1:2, 3). In what ways should we be preparing the way for the Lord? What are the elements of our message to the world? Can you summarize the message in one sentence? In one word?

4. Jesus’ baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry. The event was solemnized by a demonstration that was both visible and audible. Can you think of other Bible characters whose public ministry began with a similar type of demonstration? Has there been a time in your experience when you felt God anointing you for a particular purpose or ministry? If so, what was it, and how did He call you to serve Him?

5. Jesus’ first disciples were not learned or theologically sophisticated; yet, Jesus called them to follow Him. What characteristics made them useful for Christ’s purposes? What rough edges still needed to be smoothed out? What correlation is there between their experience and ours?
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?
Witnessing

The core, the very heart, of the account of Jesus’ ministry that the Gospel writer Mark shares with us is that Jesus and His Father are One. Jesus was not a created being; He was not suddenly brought into existence for the purpose of ministering to humankind and just doing good works. No, Jesus IS God; He has always been; His existence has no beginning and no end. He is forever and ever. The plan of salvation, culminating in His death on the cross, was conceived by God the Father and God the Son. God the Son, Jesus, came from heaven to planet Earth to accomplish the mission of salvation, and to do this He accepted humanity’s likeness and form. However, He never lost, exchanged, or compromised His divinity. How blessed we are to know that this God who became a man loves us so very much that He would go to such lengths to set us free from sin and ensure our future salvation! Our gratitude should know no bounds.

So, when someone saves your life, how do you express your enormous gratitude? How do you begin to thank this person adequately for the gift of life? How do you repay him or her?

Jesus has shared with us how we may best reward and thank Him. He just asks that we follow Him, that we honor His law, and that we share the good news of salvation with others.

Sharing the good news with others should be as natural for us as breathing. It will be that natural if we have truly accepted Jesus and His way of life.

Most people are constantly looking for new and better ways to improve themselves and their lifestyles. So, one way to witness for Him (and improve your own health at the same time) is to drop by a gym regularly or attend an exercise class (go to one in the community so you can meet nonchurch members). Get to know the people. You’ll have a wonderful opportunity to share a common interest—the quest for better health and improved healthful living practices. Over time, you’ll find more opportunities to share God’s love and the plan of salvation with them.

Witnessing from the heart daily shows Jesus how much we love Him and how eternally grateful we are for His supreme sacrifice on our behalf.

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TEACHERS COMMENTS

The call is basic: Turn away from sin and believe in Jesus. But a call without fellowship renders the kingdom an empty philosophy; and fellowship without a call renders the kingdom nothing but a social club. From the inception, Jesus preached the good news and built a discipleship to witness to His saving power. *Repent, believe, follow,* and *go* thus became the bricks of Christian discipleship.
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?
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “When Billy Graham preached in Shreveport, Louisiana, liquor sales dropped by 40 per cent and the sale of Bibles increased 300 per cent. During a mission in Seattle, amongst the results there is stated quite simply, ‘Several impending divorce actions were cancelled.’ In Greensboro, North Carolina, the report was that ‘the entire social structure of the city was affected.’ . . .


Thought Questions:
1. Monday’s lesson explains the gospel as the “news of victory.” John the Baptist was the bearer of this good news. What reactions do you think took place as a result of John’s message? What is the reaction of the world today to the “news of victory”? In what ways is our church, as did John the Baptist or Billy Graham, shaking up towns? What kinds of improvement can be made to our methods of delivering the gospel?

2. John the Baptist was by no means “mainstream.” Everything about him—his clothing, his food, his mannerisms—was a contradiction to the institutions and cultures of Jerusalem. Were his peculiarities necessary to his function as the bearer of news? Explain. Parallel his peculiarities to that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. How does our peculiar “culture” help us in the spreading of the gospel? Does it deter in any way?

Application Questions:
1. When Christianity touches a community, there most certainly will be positive changes. Identify the needs of your community. Then come up with at least three specific ways Christianity and your church can fulfill these needs.

2. The Gospel of Mark leaves out many of the details recorded in the other three Gospels. Mark’s emphasis is the Sonship of the divine Jesus. Mark is careful not to clutter his message with trivia. His strong focus on the divinity of Jesus makes the book powerful. How can our church, as did Mark, eliminate the clutter and focus on the crux of our message? And what is the crux?

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.”
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?
Key Text: *Mark 1:41*

**Teachers Aims:**

1. To understand the world in which Jesus lived.
2. To demonstrate how Jesus related to people.
3. To draw parallels between Jesus’ role in the world and our role as Christians.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Jesus: Your Personal Savior** (*Mark 2:17*).
   A. Jesus wants to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.
   B. Receiving Jesus’ goodness should motivate us to serve God and others.
   C. Even though we experience God’s goodness, human weakness often negates any effect it might have on our lives.

II. **Sin As a Disease** (*Mark 2:5*).
    A. Sin affects even those who are not obvious victims of it.
    B. As demonstrated by His reaction to the lepers, Jesus was not bound by cultural propriety.
    C. Jesus calls us to show the same compassion, even when it may be uncomfortable.

III. **Our Biggest Problem** (*Mark 2:10*).
    A. Many of the difficulties in our lives have spiritual roots.
    B. While Jesus healed physical ailments, His primary goal was to heal the rift between humankind and God.
    C. Many of those most in need of such healing are unaware of it and take refuge in religiosity.

**Summary:** Although the challenges of Jesus’ day were often unique, they were the same in principle as the ones we face. We also struggle with alienation from God and a failure to recognize Him as the answer to life’s difficulties. Jesus still offers His grace and salvation.

**COMMENTARY**

Capernaum was Jesus’ Galilean headquarters. His ministry there was revolutionary, because He introduced a transformation designed to create a new community. This week’s study shows three characteristics of His transforming ministry: authority, love, and power.

I. **The Authority of Jesus: In Word and Deed.**

Jesus’ public ministry began in a synagogue on a Sabbath (*Mark 1:21*). The audience was astonished at His preaching, “for He
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.)
taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (vs. 22, NKJV). Personal conviction of one’s calling, prayerful communion with God, a living experience with the Word, a passionate commitment to reach the listeners for God, and a walk consistent with the talk are the marks of authoritative preaching. Such preaching may not show intellectual mastery, but it confronts the listeners with the truth of God’s Word in such a way that even devils tremble.

So trembled a devil in the Capernaum synagogue. There the Torah may have been read a thousand times, but the preaching of Jesus immediately disturbed the unclean spirit. Preaching that does not disturb Satan and sinner is no preaching at all. Authentic preaching is a call to search the inner depths of one’s soul. Jesus’ preaching forced the evil spirits to publicly acknowledge who the Preacher was (Mark 1:24). By so saying, the devil admitted to three truths. First, Jesus was a real Person. Second, He is the Holy One of God—coeternal, coexistent, and coequal with the Father. Third, Jesus came to destroy Satan and his followers (1 John 3:8) at the end of time and now by delivering individuals one by one from Satan’s clutches. Hence, Jesus ordered, “‘Come out of him’” (Mark 1:25), and instantly the man was freed. Lucifer, who questioned Jesus’ authority in heaven, now had to admit Jesus had authority over all creation, including evil angels.

II. The Love of Jesus: Inclusive and Limitless

Three incidents in this week’s study exemplify the limitless, inclusive love of Jesus.

Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31). In many cultures today, the societal norms are no better than they were in Jesus’ day. A woman is not accepted as equal to a man. To a Roman, a Greek, or a thousand other males today, a woman is just a tool to meet his need, cook his food, bear his children, and keep his house. But not so with Jesus. As soon as He heard Peter’s mother-in-law was sick, Jesus’ love and compassion crossed the gender frontier. “He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her” (vs. 31, NKJV). Gender was not an issue here to the One who created “male and female” (Gen. 1:27). He saw a need and ministered to it.

The leper (Mark 1:40-45). The prejudice and isolation regarding lepers continue to thrive in our time—in the shadows of cathedrals, temples, and symbols of opulence. Lepers (or AIDS victims) still wait for Jesus or someone who has taken His name seriously. The faith of the leper in this week’s study enabled him to hope, believe, and dare: “‘If You are willing, You can make me clean’” (vs. 40, NKJV). The love and care of Jesus know no boundaries. “I am willing; be cleansed,” says Jesus.

The calling of Matthew (Mark 2:14-17). Jesus’ call to the tax
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?
collector shows His love transcends barriers erected by hatred. The Jews considered tax collectors to be stool pigeons of the Roman oppressors, who deserved to be stoned to death just as adulterers were. Yet, Jesus called Matthew. Christian discipleship is based not on who we are or what we do but on our willingness to follow Christ. Discipleship calls for a listening ear, a believing mind, a loving heart, and a commitment to carry the cross.

III. The Power of Jesus: To Forgive Sins.

Our study thus far has shown the authority and the love of Jesus in His teaching, healing, and the overcoming of devils. Our lesson

Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Mark 1:21–2:17*

1. The difference between Jesus’ teaching and that of the synagogue rulers was that Jesus “taught them as one who had authority” (*Mark 1:22, NIV*). Today, on cable television, the Internet, through books and videos, dozens of voices teach *with authority*. They can’t all be right. What criteria can we use when deciding whom to believe? *See Isa. 8:20, Matt. 7:17.*

2. In Jesus’ day leprosy was often viewed as an act of judgment, God’s way of punishing someone. It became a symbol of sin. By healing those with leprosy, Jesus showed that no one is beyond hope of physical and spiritual healing. To whom, specifically, would this be especially good news today? In what practical ways can this news be communicated? Outline a “ministry” that would benefit those you identified.

3. There are at least four types of people represented at the healing of the paralytic (*Mark 2:1-12*): (1) the paralytic, (2) the friends, (3) the scribes, and (4) the crowd. The owner of the house might also be included in this list. Each had a different perspective or a unique way of viewing the situation. If you were type-cast in a drama about this incident, which character(s) would you play? Would you play different characters at different times in your Christian experience? Explain.

4. The secondary characters in this week’s study (Jesus is the primary character) were the marginalized, the bottom dwellers of society. Yet, Jesus treated them all with respect and went to extraordinary lengths to minister to them. If we wanted to emulate the way Jesus treated people, what forms would it take, and to whom would we minister?
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?**
also has shown that Jesus has power to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12). Healing the paralytic in response to his faith would have been conclusive proof that Jesus is no ordinary man. But He saw in the healing of the paralytic not only an occasion to reveal His power over disease but also His power to forgive sins. To a Jew, sickness was a

**Witnessing**

The world loves action heroes: characters (real or imaginary) who are “larger than life.” The “knight in shining armor” who will rescue someone in distress just in the nick of time. The “superhero” who will save the situation at the very last possible moment.

Champions represent the “little guy,” the person who is often overlooked, those who seem to be the least deserving, the rejects of society. A real-life champion of the overlooked in society was a tiny woman who was simply called Mother Teresa and whose ministry took place in the heart of India. She and her followers lived among the neediest of the needy. They ministered daily by providing food, shelter, and love. Most important, they dispensed hope.

The following story captures how hope transformed the life of a man who was overlooked by many but not by God. It was shared at a General Conference morning worship by Elder Barry Black, newly appointed chaplain to the U. S. Senate and the first Seventh-day Adventist to hold that position. A young man, filthy and drunk, showed up one night at an evangelistic series. He sat down and promptly went to sleep. Several deacons acted to remove him from the meetings, but the evangelist asked them to leave the young man in peace. The next night the young man came back and the next night after that and the following one. Soon he was making an attempt to sit up during the service. At the end of the series, the young man disappeared. No one knew what became of him.

One day the evangelist was greeted by a young pastor who said to him, “You don’t remember me, but I once sat in evangelistic meetings where you were preaching. You wouldn’t allow others to throw me out. Over time I began to listen to what you said. After the meetings I stopped drinking, and I gave my heart to God. I went to college, and I’m a preacher today because of you. Thank God for your witness!”

These are only two powerful examples of how ordinary people witness to the overlooked about the Superhero of all ages—Jesus Christ. What the world overlooks, God sees. Those who are invisible to society and those the world turns a blind eye toward are the very ones God is watching over. God invites us to be His eyes on this earth and to keep searching for all whose hearts are ready to receive Him. Our Savior has proven He can and will change lives and hearts. He’s exactly what the world needs, and He asks that we share Him with the world!
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.)
result of sinfulness (see Job 4:7, NKJV). The theology that links sickness to sin may not be fully correct, but who would deny that it is the entrance of sin that marred God’s original design of perfection? In saying, “‘Your sins are forgiven’” (Mark 2:9, NKJV), Jesus was affirming the wholistic nature of His redemptive plan—a plan that includes the healing of a person’s body, mind, and soul.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Even as a child, Oscar Cervantes was trouble—to family, friends, and the neighborhood. The older he got, the more trouble he got into. As an adult he was imprisoned 17 times before the prison psychiatrists totally gave up on him. They said he was beyond the point of return. There was no hope for Oscar. However, during one of his brief periods of freedom outside prison, he met someone in love with Jesus. The power of Jesus turned Oscar around, and Oscar became a disciple.

Thought Questions:

1. What do you think is the relationship between faith and divine power? What kinds of statements of faith should a church make in today’s world? In what ways can divine power be manifested within the church?

2. Jesus demonstrates His awesome power by reaching those thought to be beyond the point of return, those such as Oscar Cervantes. Is there ever a point when our heart becomes so hard-ened it cannot respond to the divine power of Christ? Explain.

3. During Jesus’ time many followed Him just to see His miracles. Many joined Him because of the miracles. Why do you think Jesus used miracles? Compared to the people of Jesus’ time, are we at an advantage or disadvantage?

Application Questions:

1. List biblical characters who accomplished great things because of their intimate connection with God. Assess your personal spiritual life to see how you can become more like them. Imagine the difference you could make in your home, church, and neighborhood if you had a stronger relationship with God.

2. Someone has said that the only people without problems are those in the cemetery! Sometimes our personal problems get in the way of our good intentions to respond to opportunities to serve our God. What practical things can we do to keep our focus off our problems?

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 paralytic, 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.
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.
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.—something less than 2/3 mi. . . . It was also counted as Sabbath-breaking 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?
Key Text: *Mark 2:24-28*

Teachers Aims:

1. To demonstrate how even religious people can miss the point of their beliefs and practices.
2. To show how a firm but mistaken belief can blind people to what they need to know.
3. To analyze how religion can become a force that opposes God.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Sabbath: Made for Whom? (*Mark 2:27*).
   A. In Jesus’ time the Sabbath had become an end unto itself with little thought as to the meaning of its observance.
   B. Sabbath observance as taught by the Pharisees actually impeded service to God and others.
   C. By healing on the Sabbath, Jesus pointed out the original reason for the day.

II. Eyes Wide Shut (*Mark 2:14-20*).
   A. Jesus’ enemies—the supposedly devoted religious leaders—were the very people who should have been His friends.
   B. They were willfully blind to the divine origin of both Jesus and His teachings.
   C. Jesus’ enemies opposed God in order to preserve the purity of “their” religion.

III. Brothers, Mothers, Disciples (*Mark 3:35*).
   A. Jesus sought people who were open to God’s will.
   B. It was this quality that led Him to choose His disciples, although they were unpromising by “worldly” standards.
   C. Jesus set this quality above even family relationships.

Summary: Religion and obedience to what one assumes to be God’s will are generally good. However, the Pharisees and others of Jesus’ time used religion and God’s law to escape from God. Their religion, therefore, became merely another addiction. In contrast, Jesus attempted to demonstrate true godliness, which often appeared to conflict with long-established beliefs and teachings.

COMMENTARY

Our understanding of the great controversy teaches that both God and Satan are at work. In this war, Satan misrepresents God’s gifts. Our study this week deals with how Satan led religious leaders to clash with Jesus over the Sabbath, discipleship and God’s new family, and the ministry of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
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?
I. The Sabbath: Meaning and Purpose *(Mark 2:23–3:6).*

The Sabbath originated in Creation and is, therefore, universal in its application. When Jesus at Sinai gave Israel custody of the Ten Commandments, He expected them to keep the Sabbath as a day of delight *(Isa. 58:13).* Instead, they made it burdensome by heaping rule after rule upon it. For example, Jews could not light a candle on the Sabbath; but a Gentile could do it for them. A cut finger may be bandaged, but no ointment should be used.

Mark cites two instances to warn us against making Sabbath a burden. First, while crossing a grainfield on a Sabbath, the disciples plucked some grain to eat *(Mark 2:23-28).* The Pharisees rushed to judgment: “ ‘Why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ ” *(vs. 24, NKJV).* Jesus turned to the Bible for an answer: “ ‘Have you never read . . . ?’ ” *(Mark 2:25, NKJV).* Jesus reminded them that when David and his hungry men ate the showbread that only priests could eat *(Lev. 24:5-9)* it was not considered a sin. Then He stated that the “ ‘Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ” *(Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV).* God did not create humans because He needed someone to keep the Sabbath. No person or religion has the right to go beyond what the Lord of the Sabbath has determined the Sabbath should be.

The Jews clashed again with Jesus because He healed a man with a withered hand on Sabbath *(Mark 3:1-6).* But Jesus raised the argument to a higher level by asking: “ ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ ” *(vs. 4, NKJV).* Is Sabbath not a symbol of God’s creative and redemptive power? Does God’s mercy ever take a holiday?

How ironic was the position of the Pharisees! Even while they were condemning Him for breaking the Sabbath, they were plotting to kill Him *(vs. 6).*

II. Discipleship and the New Family *(Mark 3:13-19, 31-35).*

Jesus “called to Him those He Himself wanted” *(Mark 3:13, NKJV).* The authority to choose disciples is in the hands of the Master. We cannot force ourselves to be disciples. He calls whom He wills. Then we obey. How tragic that in today’s church, people campaign for certain positions, forgetting that Jesus calls those He Himself wants.

Christianity began with a mixed group—the angry, the ambitious, the timid, the zealot, the doubting, the daring, and the betraying. Each had a place in the group Jesus formed “that He might send them out to preach . . . to heal . . . and to cast out demons” *(vss. 14, 15, NKJV).* Discipleship is thus a call to ministry, not to power. When this is recognized, a fisherman becomes a Pentecostal
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?
thunder, a doubter becomes a missionary to faraway India, one ambitious brother becomes the first martyr, while another sees the heavens open.

From discipleship, Jesus moved to create a new family, not one of flesh and blood but one formed by “whoever does the will of God” (Mark 3:35, NKJV). Here lies the secret of Christian familyhood. Why did William Carey cross the oceans and land in Calcutta among strangers? Why did Albert Schweitzer leave the fame of being a surgeon or a philosopher to live with the lepers of Africa? Simply because they grasped the meaning of the new family in Jesus.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Mark 2:23–3:35

1 According to Jewish traditions, the disciples were breaking the Sabbath by picking heads of grain (harvesting) and eating them (threshing). What was the significance of Jesus mentioning David and the temple bread? And what did He mean by the statement: “‘The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath’” (Mark 2:27, NRSV)? What are some practical implications of that statement?

2 Jesus could have healed the man with the withered hand on any day, not just the Sabbath. Yet, He chose to engage the Pharisees on an issue that was sure to inflame them. Is it any wonder that from that point “the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus” (Mark 3:6, NIV)? What was Jesus’ intent at pursuing such a course? Is this an invitation or a warning about forcing confrontation?

3 Of all those who followed Him, Jesus chose 12 and gave them the special designation apostle, which means “one who is sent.” This is a technical term indicating the apostle had all the authority of the one who sent him. How well did the apostles demonstrate their special relationship with Christ? What makes our influence effective or ineffective when we attempt to represent Christ in our communities?

4 There is no sin God cannot or will not forgive. A sin becomes “unpardonable” when the person who commits it refuses to ask for forgiveness. We can insulate ourselves from the Holy Spirit and His influence, but we can’t stop Him from trying to influence us. Describe three modern object lessons that illustrate what the unpardonable sin really is.
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?
III. The Spirits and the Spirit (Mark 3:20-27).

Name calling is used to destroy a person’s character. So, the Pharisees accused Christ as being Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons who casts out demons.

Christ’s answer was simple. How can Satan work against himself? To attribute God’s work to Satan is to be Satan’s instrument.

Witnessing

How we need and love the Sabbath! During the course of any workweek, we exert a lot of mental and physical labor. Whatever our profession, ordinary, daily pressure and stress take their toll. As the week wears on, so do we—irritability, short-temperedness, and frustration tempt us. We may feel so emotionally drained that all we want to do is sleep. Our bodies become sore and tense. Yet, as Seventh-day Adventists, we know that when Friday afternoon comes, our spirits will begin to rise—it’s as though a huge weight is lifting itself from us. By evening we are looking forward to spending quality time with our Lord and Savior.

Now, think how hard it must be for those around us who don’t know about the joys of the Sabbath. Their Friday nights and Saturdays remain rushed and busy. They don’t have the respite from everyday responsibilities and duties that we do. Haven’t we received direct instruction from Jesus to share the blessings of the Sabbath with others?

In our study this week we have been reminded that Jesus knew the Sabbath to be a deep blessing to humankind; therefore, He was disturbed over the way the religious leaders of the time twisted its observance so it became ritualistic and burdensome for those who attempted to observe the Sabbath. Christ made it a point to try to change all that—to show the people how spiritually refreshing and welcoming true Sabbath observance could be.

Look around; don’t you see others missing out on the Sabbath’s blessings? Don’t they need and deserve to have the same blessings of the Sabbath as we do? Of course! So, here’s something to consider. Call a friend who doesn’t observe the Sabbath and invite him or her to spend the day with you. If this person is uncomfortable or reluctant to attend church, see whether he or she will go with you to Sabbath School. If not, tell your friend you’d like to have him or her join you for lunch and then spend the afternoon and evening together, celebrating the Sabbath according to God’s plan. Once the day is over, let the person know how much you enjoyed sharing time and companionship. Invite your friend to do it with you again as soon as he or she is able. Be persistent but not pushy. Invite your friend to begin the week with the blessings found only in true Sabbath thanksgiving.
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?
Such people become hardened and perceive evil to be good and good to be evil—until they reach the point where they recognize neither evil nor the need for salvation. When sinners cannot repent, they commit the sin against the Holy Spirit, who alone leads one to repentance.

Hence, Jesus warns us to take sin seriously, lest one commits the sin against the Spirit, for which there is no forgiveness. “The most common manifestation of the sin against the Holy Spirit is in persistently slighting Heaven’s invitation to repent. Every step in the rejection of Christ is a step toward the rejection of salvation, and toward the sin against the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 324.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** “The term ‘pharisaic’ has come over into English to refer to hypocrites who fake morality or tolegalistic nitpickers. The word is considered to be synonymous with ‘holier than thou,’ ‘preachy,’ ‘sanctimonious,’ and ‘self-righteous.’ This assumption is an inaccurate caricature of Pharisaism and can perpetuate the notion that God extends grace to all sinners except those of the Pharisaic variety. One may not dismiss the Pharisees as a bunch of hypocrites. In the Gospel of Mark, they are guilty instead of being hypercritical.”—David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary, Mark* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), pp. 110, 111.

**Thought Questions:**

1. This week’s study is full of examples of how Jesus’ fame and popularity quickly spread. Objectors to Jesus’ interpretations of Scripture posed many questions and challenges. Study the responses of Jesus (for example, in Mark 2:16, 17 He responds with a truism). From His responses, what lessons can you learn about defending your beliefs?

2. How did Jesus’ actions on the Sabbath not only defy the Pharisees but also vindicate His authority as Creator? What role did the Sabbath play in the fulfillment of Jesus’ mission on earth? What role does the Sabbath play in affirming your spiritual life?

**Application Question:**

What were the Pharisees’ intentions when they made up the Sabbath laws? What elements of the Sabbath laws did Jesus have problems with? Why? What guidelines for Sabbath keeping can we learn from Jesus’ example?

**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 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?
Key Text: *Mark 4:10, 11*

Teachers Aims:

1. To understand what Jesus’ parables and miracles, as recorded by Mark, tell us about the kingdom of God.
2. To demonstrate how this kingdom manifests itself in the midst of the everyday world.
3. To apply the lessons of the parables and miracles to our own lives.

Lesson Outline:

**I. The Kingdom Is Like a Seed** (*Mark 4:30-32*).
   A. The kingdom of God is distinct from—but in the midst of—the world.
   B. People have the option of ignoring or refusing the kingdom.
   C. God’s kingdom can be contrasted with earthly authorities, who rule by force.

**II. Things Not Seen** (*Mark 4:35-40*).
   A. Faith may not always seem to be a rational response to external events.
   B. In times of trial it is easy to believe God does not care or even does not exist.
   C. We may have to have faith in spite of our feelings of doubt.

**III. Toxic Faith** (*Mark 5:25-28*).
   A. False interpretations of religious teachings in Jesus’ time caused many to have misplaced faith or to lose their faith entirely.
   B. Legitimate teachings can be misinterpreted in such a way that they are dangerous to true faith.
   C. We must be discerning in how we apply our deeply held beliefs and practices.

Summary: Jesus is and was widely known for His miracles and parables. All these, especially as presented in Mark, were not merely random wonders and marvels but were tightly focused on Jesus’ message and mission of salvation. To this day they teach essential truths about God’s nature and character and His will for us.

**COMMENTARY**

This week’s study deals with four parables and four miracles that present Jesus as the Master Teacher and the Lord of power.

**I. Jesus: The Master Teacher.**

The parable of the sower (*Mark 4:3-20*). The first lesson this parable teaches is how lavishly God bestows His truth and grace upon humanity. God casts the seed of truth far and wide. He does not, however, force anyone to accept the truth. The result of His
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.
sowing depends upon the condition of the soil—the human heart. That is the parable’s second lesson. The difference between the first three types of soil and the last type is rooting and fruit bearing. Fruit bearing requires an absolute response to, and a firm rooting in, God’s Word.

The parable of the growing seed *(Mark 4:26-29).* This parable is found only in Mark. It does not emphasize human response but the inevitability of God’s reign. We cannot create the kingdom. Its growth is as imperceptible and as sure as the life in a seed. Its consummation is real and will lead to either harvest or judgment.

The parable of the mustard seed *(Mark 4:30-32).* This parable takes the smallest seed and shows how it grows to a size astronomically larger than its beginnings. (It takes some twenty thousand mustard seeds to weigh an ounce.) Jesus often spoke of the value of the small—the widow’s mite, the lost coin, a cup of cold water, one of these little ones *(Matt. 10:42, Luke 15:8-10, 21:2-4).* In such insignificant symbols of existence, God’s glory shines.

The Pharisees referred to the birds of the air in this parable as symbolic of the Gentiles. As the mustard plant provided shelter to the birds of the air, so does the kingdom create a nesting place for all peoples of the world.

The parable of the lamp *(Mark 4:21, 22).* Here, Jesus revealed certain essentials of the kingdom no Christian can ignore. The kingdom is light. Let the light not be suppressed by careless indifference or selfish hoarding. Genuine disciples will not hide the light under a bushel of plenty or a bed of ease.

II. Jesus: The Lord of Power.

Our lesson narrates four miracles that testify to Jesus as the Lord of power over nature, demons, sickness, and death *(Mark 4:35–5:43).*

Calming the storm *(Mark 4:35-41).* The Sea of Galilee is 680 feet below sea level and surrounded by hills. Winds blowing across these hills often cause storms to arise quickly. So, this storm was no surprise; but it portrays the panic of the human and the power of the divine. The disciples had seen Jesus’ power over nature many times. Yet, in fear, they awoke Jesus to ask the most astonishing question: “‘Do You not care?’” *(vs. 38, NKJV).* Unbelief is the parent of panic, and it persists in human nature unless that nature continually submits to God.

The healing of the demoniac *(Mark 5:1-20).* The demoniac was a portrait of pity; but with Jesus came change. The demons certainly knew Jesus, and their impending doom aroused a strange request: “‘Send us to the swine’” *(vs. 12, NKJV).* Thus, a herd of 2,000 swine rushed to their death. The demoniac, however, rose to a new life. The villagers saw the miracle, but that made no difference to their worldview: Business was more important than the transformation of a soul.
**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?

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

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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?**

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The frustrating thing about gardening is that we can’t force something to grow. We can prepare the soil and provide water and fertilizer, but the actual growth of a seed is out of our control. In the parable of the sower (Mark 4:3-9) the only difference between success and failure was the soil. How can we help God turn rocky, thorny soil into good soil?

It must have been some kind of storm that terrified seasoned, experienced fisher folk. Gradually, their attention shifted from the storm to Jesus’ inactivity on their behalf. They said, “‘Teacher, don’t you care?’” (Mark 4:38, NIV). Often we struggle with circumstances that seem insurmountable. But just as Jesus answered His disciples with a question, so He asks us, “‘Why are you so afraid?’” (vs. 40, NIV). Invite class members to share briefly when they felt deserted by God and how they were reminded of His presence.

The story of the demon-possessed man (Mark 5:1-20) is another example of how the same situation sparked widely different reactions from the characters involved. Some saw Jesus as a Savior, some as a threat; no one stayed neutral. Jesus’ parting instructions to the formerly demon-possessed man are instructive (vs. 19): Our mission isn’t so much to convert strangers as it is to testify of God’s mercy in our lives. What is the gist of your testimony?

Jesus’ miracles for the sick woman and the dead girl were about restoration. He didn’t just restore them to health and life; He restored them to their families, to their communities, to lives of service for God. How are you using your life in Christ to serve God and others?
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.
ing faith and He stopped! The touch of one anonymous woman in a
crowd halted the Lord of glory. That is the glorious truth of this inci-
dent. She touched Him. So can we.”—Peter Marshall, Mr. Jones,

The raising of Jairus’s daughter from death (Mark 5:22-24,
35-43) also reveals that Jesus is no respecter of persons. It is the
need and the faith of the individual that define Jesus’ saving min-
istry. The faith of Jairus was a saving faith, and it began when Jairus
rejected the social and religious prestige that went with his position.
He set aside his dignity, pride, and perhaps even his close friends to
reach out to Jesus.

Faith gave Jairus hope that Jesus would bring the dead to life. Jesus
did precisely that. “‘Little girl, I say to you, arise’” (Mark 5:41,

Witnessing

Training to become a great violinist begins early in life. Faithful practicing brings improvement: enhanced interpretation
of the music, better control of the fingers, greater understanding
of the instrument—its flexibility and its limitations. As time
passes, with many hours of practice, strong determination, and
unwavering focus, the sounds advance from “ear splitting” to
“soul moving.” The process, however, can take a lifetime.

So it is with the Christian experience. Our spiritual journey
begins the day of our conversion. Sometimes it seems the more we
try to follow God’s plan for our lives, the more failure we
encounter. The devil works hard to discourage and waylay us in
every possible way. If we keep our eyes constantly focused on
Jesus, however, we remain immune to Satan’s deceptions. As Peter
found out the hard way, when we take our eyes off the Savior for
even one minute, we begin to lose control and sink rapidly.
Nothing pleases Satan more than to see God’s children in trouble.
Nothing pleases God more than to answer our cry for help.

Spend time this week answering the following questions: Why
is it so hard for us to ask for help when we know our hea
venly
Father wants desperately to hear from us? Why don’t we make
more of an effort to help others whom we see struggling with sin?
Why do we seem, all too often, to call on God only when we’re
in desperate need?

Those around us who have not yet accepted Jesus as their per-
sonal Savior have not yet begun their spiritual journey. We must
not miss any opportunity to open up the plan of salvation to them.
Satan will do anything to throw up roadblocks in order to prevent
us from witnessing. Be prepared for rough sailing at times like
this, and remember: The more difficult the journey, the sweeter
the destination.
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?**
**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** A military officer and his wife were aboard a ship that was caught in a raging ocean storm. Seeing the frantic look in his wife’s eyes, the man tried to calm her, but no matter what he said, she continued to be hysterical. He held the hilt of the sword that he wore at his side. “Are you afraid of this?” Without hesitation she answered, “Of course not!” “Why not?” he asked. “Because it’s in your hand, and you love me too much to hurt me.” To this he smiled and replied, “I know the One who holds the winds and the waters in the hollow of His hand, and He will surely care for us!”

**Thought Questions:**

1. The Sea of Galilee had a nasty reputation; so when Jesus calmed its waters, it was a really big deal. What did this miracle have to do with Jesus’ establishing Himself as God? What kind of assurance comes with the knowledge that God has dominion over all creation?

2. The same disciples who witnessed previous miracles of Jesus were astonished when He calmed the sea. Why, then, do you think they raised the question, “‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’” *(Mark 4:41, NIV)*? What did they mean when they questioned His identity?

**Application Questions:**

1. Because Jesus was sleeping through the storm, the disciples assumed Jesus didn’t care about them. What makes you question whether Jesus cares for you? How can you discover His care for you? How does knowledge of God in total control of the universe make a difference to you?

2. From the miracle of the storm, what lessons can you glean that can help you endure adversities in life? Why is mere knowledge of God insufficient to get you through difficult times?

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.
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?
Key Text: Mark 6:2-6

Teachers Aims: 
1. To explain why many people of Jesus’time rejected Him.
2. To show how our expectations of God damage our relationship with Him.
3. To stress that to maintain our faith we must constantly fight against distractions.

Lesson Outline:
   A. Many of Jesus’ followers wanted Him to meet their own expectations of Him.
   B. Jesus did not hesitate to defy these expectations, even at the cost of His own popularity.
   C. The true nature of His followers’ commitment became clear when they abandoned Him.

II. The Messiah We Choose (Mark 7:5).
   A. In His role as Messiah, Jesus bore the burden of what people thought He should be.
   B. In spite of what we know to be true, we often try to manipulate God to do our bidding.
   C. Jesus’ unwillingness to cater to others’ false beliefs played a role in His death.

III. Conforming to His Will (Mark 7:6-8).
   A. Our lives are a constant struggle between doing God’s will or doing our own.
   B. If we are not watchful, our religion will become a self-serving exercise.
   C. We are not justified by works. However, the life of faith comprises work—on ourselves, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Summary: Wrongly understood, religion can become a selfish quest to have one’s needs and desires met. This is the way it was for many people who followed Jesus. Thus, they abandoned Him when He failed to meet their expectations. Jesus does meet our needs, but in order to gain what He offers, we must serve God and others.

COMMENTARY

This week’s study portrays Jesus as the model of Christian ministry. The gospel work is not a journey of continuous joy and success. But the lesson shows that no matter what happens on the ministerial path, neither fear nor smug satisfaction are options. “‘Take heart, it is I’” (Mark 6:50, RSV) is the Lord’s cheering counsel. He is the eternal I who is always with His followers.
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.


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?
I. Take Heart When Rejected.

If Jesus had been a politician determined to please the crowds, Nazareth would have given Him a hero’s welcome. But Jesus did not come to Nazareth with a message that would massage the souls of His hearers. His message proclaimed freedom, demanded repentance, and identified Himself as the Messiah (see Luke 4:16-21). Because this combined to make a bitter pill to swallow, the citizens of Nazareth added up what they knew about Jesus’ birth, His mother, family, occupation, and background. The sum of their addition was not equal to the Messiah. After all, was Jesus not one of them? Worse still, was He not the son of Mary? Such questions slandered both His authority and His pedigree. So, why did this Man think He could apply the Messianic prophecies to Himself? (Isa. 49:8, 9; 61:1, 2; see also Luke 4:18, 19).

Because their concept of truth was defined by the facts they knew, the people of Nazareth failed to recognize that saving truth is more than facts. It is God’s self-disclosure in the Person of Jesus. But Nazareth had no time for such reflection; instead, it chose rejection. When rejection threatens you, take heart; Jesus experienced it also.

II. Take Heart Amid Persecution.

Being a faithful witness to truth is not without its price. It may even cost us our life. Herod could sever John’s head but not his soul. The Divine Mender at the final reckoning will resurrect John—head and all. However, He also will ask Herod some head-splitting questions concerning accountability. What will the ruthless, truthless, and spineless Herod say?

The story’s characters are complex. John the Baptist, a fearless prophet like Nathan, called sin by its right name and preferred death to falsehood. Herod Antipas equated lust with love, added sin to sin, and lost all sense of truth and morality. Herodias sacrificed both morality and motherhood: one on the altar of lust and the other on the altar of revenge, even at the cost of exposing her own daughter to prostitution. Salome, unwilling to take her own stand, became the pawn in a wicked scheme.

In a world of compromise and half-truths, “the greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 57.

III. Take Heart in Discipleship.

Christian discipleship involves more than a call to witness. It requires an abiding relationship with Jesus, participation in His caring ministry, absolute trust in His power, and a willingness to choose Him over all other choices.
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?
The call. It is God who issues the call. We merely respond. Moses by the burning bush, Peter by the sea fishing, Paul on the Damascus road—the call comes whichever way God chooses. Obedience to that call involves placing Christ and His kingdom above all distractions (Mark 6:8, 9) and recognizing that discipleship is not competition but partnership (Mark 6:7). However, Jesus does not promise uninterrupted success (Mark 6:10, 11). Rather, He offers us power (Mark 6:7) that alone enables us to fulfill our calling.

Caring ministry. Discipleship involves both preaching and car-

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Mark 6:1–7:23

1 Is it possible to know someone too well? The folk in Nazareth had seen Jesus grow up among them (Mark 6:1-3); and as His reputation grew throughout the region, they must have asked themselves, “What’s the big deal?” Are there ways our familiarity with the gospel or other religious truths makes us complacent? How can we stay enthusiastic about Bible truth?

2 The lives of John the Baptist and Jesus illustrate the peril of standing for principle. They both were executed because they refused to be silent about the moral and societal deficiencies of religious and political leaders. Yet, we often form associations with community leaders who hold different religious convictions than ours. How do you reconcile the two? Does God call for different strategies at different times? If so, what are they?

3 The story of feeding the 5,000 shows that Jesus often met people at the level of their felt needs in order to build relationships and communicate spiritual truths. What are some ways your congregation is meeting the felt needs of your community? What methods have you found useful in moving past satisfying physical needs to ministering to your community’s spiritual needs?

4 The Pharisees had developed a culture based on mechanical, rote obedience that was, in many ways, the direct opposite of what God had in mind for His people. It was on this level that Jesus often found Himself in opposition to the Pharisees. His ministry was dedicated to breaking down human standards of behavior in favor of eternal principles defined by God. Give three examples of human traditions Jesus opposed. Give three examples of God’s eternal principles Jesus supported.
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.
ing. Preaching invites people to God. Caring *brings* God to people. When hunger confronted the 5,000, the disciples urged Him to “‘send them away’”; but Jesus commanded, “‘You give them something to eat’” (*Mark 6:36, 37, NKJV*). Where humanity sees the impossible, divinity sees the possible; true discipleship must recognize human inadequacy and turn to the omnipotent One, who supplies all our needs (*Phil. 4:19*).

**IV. Take Heart Amid Troubles and Traditions.**

Discipleship is not a smooth journey. Dangers will arise from many sources: The seas may roar, the wind may be boisterous, and the boat may be about to sink (*Mark 6:45-51*). We might be tempted to use the power of God for our own glory (*John 6:14, 15*). Or we might be tempted to turn salvation by faith into salvation by tradition.

**Witnessing**

Thank God for the dedicated core of men and women who champion religious freedom around the world. What witnesses these warriors of God are to countless individuals confronting dangerous situations because of their faith! These individuals provide counsel and guidance and much-needed prayer to those facing enormous challenges because of their decision to live by the principles of their faith.

In our study this week, we are reminded that new believers and those contemplating joining God’s family are sometimes overwhelmed by the aftereffects of their decision to follow Jesus. The promise of a new life filled with peace and happiness is clouded by the looming possibility that life here on earth just became more difficult, because working on the Sabbath day is no longer an option. Job income and job stability are now at risk. Losing a job places a family in serious crisis—bills go unpaid, foreclosure on a home may occur, even paying for groceries becomes a concern. These new worries place additional stress on the adults, and the marriage itself may suffer. They are confronted daily by trials that threaten their new faith and dependence on God. This is just the way Satan likes to see it happen!

In all probability, you know one or more families or individuals facing such hardships. Your understanding and support can go a long way in helping to minimize the fear and uncertainty they’re facing. Here is a practical way to demonstrate Christ’s love and show faith in action. Offer everything from words of encouragement to help with finding alternate work to forming a prayer chain. Your involvement may be all it takes to keep discouragement at bay.
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”?
or ritual, thus allowing the letter of the law to replace the Lord of the law (John 7:1-23). In all such dangers, Jesus, who uplifted righteousness by faith over pride in one’s own works, assures the true disciple: Take heart, trust in Me, and you will make it to the kingdom.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: In all, only about fifty days of Jesus’ ministry are touched upon in all the combined Gospels. Jesus’ minimum term of ministry equaled three years. That means 0.046 percent, or slightly less than half of 1 percent of Jesus’ active ministering is actually recorded in the Gospels. Imagine all the teaching, the conversations, and the ministry we have never heard about. No wonder John wrote, “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). With so much proof, why did so many reject Jesus as the Savior?

Thought Questions:

1 Jesus was not the type of king the Jews expected. He did not live up to their expectations of a Messiah. How can we present the gospel without giving people the false idea that being Christian means being trouble-free? What are the dangers of having false expectations of Christianity?

2 Jesus spent most of His life in Nazareth. He was known as Joseph’s son, a carpenter. But when Jesus began His ministry in His hometown, He was rejected. Why do you think the people of Nazareth harbored such resentment to One of their own, especially One doing great things as Jesus was?

Application Questions:

1 Throughout His ministry, Jesus faced rejection by the very people He came to save. Yet, He continued His work, never letting the hurt of rejection deter Him from His mission. As Christians we sometimes face the same kind of rejection. How can we be more like Christ and focus on our mission rather than on the negatives?

2 The Pharisees were students of Scripture and were regarded as spiritual leaders. But even they rejected Christ and thought Him to be blasphemous. They were so shrouded in their traditions and routines that they left no room for the Spirit to work. How can we keep from falling into a spiritual rut as did the Pharisees?

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 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 Syrophoenician 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”?


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?
**Key Text:** *Mark 8:31-33*

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To understand why Jesus’ suffering and death were necessary.
2. To stress that in God’s eyes we are all equally valuable and worthy of salvation.
3. To explain how Christ’s passion was central to His messiahship.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **In the Cross** *(Mark 8:31).*
   A. Christ’s death was a success, not an embarrassment or failure.
   B. Without Christ’s death, His life and teachings would have little meaning.
   C. If Christ were not who He claimed to be, His death would have little meaning.

II. **Christ’s Impartiality** *(Mark 7:26-29).*
   A. In His comments to the Syro-Phoenician woman, Christ was satirizing the attitudes of His time.
   B. Christ’s example in this episode encourages us to put aside our prejudices.
   C. The woman’s assertiveness is an example to believers facing discouraging circumstances.

III. **Who Is He?** *(Mark 8:27-29).*
   A. We do not have the option of claiming that Jesus was merely a good man.
   B. If we accept that Jesus was the Messiah—and divine—we must also accept the necessity of His suffering and dying for us and the necessity of our following His example.
   C. Jesus’ death was effective for our salvation, because He is God.

**Summary:** Many are content to say Jesus was an extraordinarily good man and a “great teacher.” Christians who take the Bible seriously, however, must regard such descriptions as true but inadequate. Jesus was neither a great teacher nor a good man if He were not the Messiah and the Son of God.

**COMMENTARY**

Our study this week focuses on Jesus as the Lord of all, the Son of God, the Lord of the Cross, and the Lord of glory.

I. **Jesus, the Lord of All.**

No religious figure or philosopher has ever taught the oneness of humanity as Jesus does. Himself the Creator and Redeemer, Jesus admits no divisive factor to become between people—not gender, race, tribe, or caste *(Gal. 3:28).* Two miracles in this week’s study stress that Jesus recognized no such barriers. The first miracle occurred when a Syro-Phoenician woman approached Jesus on
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?

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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.*
behalf of her demon-possessed daughter. Consider the odds against her. She was a woman. She was a Gentile. She spoke Greek. All these condemned her as the worst of pagans. Yet, her faith, combined with her parental love, urged her to come to Jesus. Add a mother’s love for her child to faith in Christ, and you have a potent combination. But the Savior’s answer seemed harsh: “‘Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs’” (Mark 7:27, NKJV).

The woman’s faith, however, was farsighted. In the midst of what seemed harsh, she saw hope. First, Jesus used the Greek word kunaria, which refers to little pet dogs rather than the word kuon, which refers to wild, scavenger street dogs. Second, her faith asked not for loaves but for crumbs. Saving faith grasps at every opportunity Jesus offers, no matter how small.

The woman’s daughter was healed, and the disciples learned Jesus is Lord of all, that Gentiles were not outside His mercy.

The second miracle is the feeding of the 4,000 (Mark 8:1-9). Whereas the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:35-44) took place among Jews, this miracle served the Gentiles, thus showing that Jesus, the Bread from heaven, is for both. “Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character. In His sight the souls of all men are of equal value. . . . Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live.” —Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 403.

II. Jesus, the Son of God.

“‘Who do men say that I am?’” (Mark 8:27, NKJV). The answer determines our destiny. It is amazing that Jesus asked this question in Caesarea Philippi, where Baal once reigned and Roman gods and Greek mythology condoned a permissive lifestyle. But perhaps in the face of numerous gods and indulgences, Jesus offered a choice that mattered.

The disciples’ initial answer was one of evasion. Some say this, some say that. To Jesus, what others say is immaterial; what counts is a personal answer. So Jesus rephrased the question, “‘But who do you say that I am?’” Then it was that Peter made perhaps the greatest confession in history: “‘You are the Christ’” (Mark 8:29, NKJV). The Son of God, the Savior of the world. Upon that confession hangs everyone’s destiny.

III. Jesus, the Man of the Cross.

Peter’s confession led Jesus to outline the path before Him. Christ’s entry into history, leaving His heavenly throne to take upon Himself human flesh with all its humiliation (Phil. 2:5-8), had a divinely ordained purpose. He did not come just to teach, heal, or reveal His kingdom. He came to die on the cross (vs. 8). He foresaw He had to “suffer many things, and be rejected . . . and be
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?”
One of the embarrassing legacies handed down by previous generations of religious practitioners is spiritual arrogance, the idea that God loves some more than He loves those from different religious or racial backgrounds. Describe a time when you left your comfort zone to help someone who was different from you. Tell about a time when you were helped by someone of a different religious or racial background.

There comes a time in our religious experience when we all have to answer Jesus’ question: “‘Who do you say I am?’” (Mark 8:29, NIV). Our answer has eternal significance, but it also has significance in the present. How does your answer make a difference in your life every day?

Compare the concept of taking up the cross (Mark 8:34) with the idea of giving our burdens to Jesus (Matt. 11:28-30). What are the practical implications that come from blending the two concepts?

Jesus Christ is just a historical figure until He interrupts our mortal existence with a demonstration of His supernatural power and presence. What experience in your life made Jesus real to you? How have you grown in your relationship with Him since that experience?

The cross was an instrument of torture and death. Yet, Jesus promised His followers “‘life . . . to the full’” (John 10:10, NIV). In what ways is the Christian life a life of self-denial? In what ways is it a life of fulfillment?

**IV. Jesus, the Lord of Glory.**

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John pre-
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?
viewed the glorified Jesus and heard heaven’s confirmation of His ministry (*Mark 9:2-8*). Moses and Elijah communed with Jesus. They symbolize all the saints who will inherit God’s kingdom. Moses represents those who will be resurrected at the Second Coming, while Elijah is symbolic of Jesus’ disciples who will be alive and taken up when Jesus returns (*1 Thess. 4:16-18*). Because of the event that occurred on the mountain, Peter, James, and John wanted to make the site their permanent home. But before glory, there comes work—work that involves listening to Jesus and following Him with our own cross.

**Witnessing**

Our study this week contains a number of provocative statements that invite a closer look.

“Jesus was . . . born to die.” Amazing! It’s inconceivable to us that one would bring a child into the world for the express purpose of consigning it to death. Yet, Christ, One with the Father and Lord over the universe, left His throne and His heavenly home to be born in human form for the sole intended purpose of losing His life on the cross. He willingly and lovingly took upon Himself the unimaginable burden of humanity’s sins, the sins of all who would ever inhabit earth. He offered His sinless life to God the Father as substitution for humanity, because that was the only way God’s law could be fulfilled. Telling everyone we can about this incredible gift of salvation should be the primary goal of our life here on earth. If we aren’t making this a priority in our lives, what more would it take for us to do so? What could Christ possibly do to catch our full attention?

“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.” Another heavy statement to digest! Is it possible you’re thinking this statement is long overdue for those around you to whom it applies? Are you absolutely sure it doesn’t apply in any way to you? What makes you so certain you’re exempt from engaging in this type of behavior? Since it’s said that you “lead by example,” what example do you set for others in this area? Would you be prepared to look deep into your soul, and if you don’t like what you find there, would you take the next step to right the wrong? What is the next step?

“If, like Peter, they acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, their lives cannot stay the same.” How true this is. And what a powerful statement to end on and reflect upon.
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.
Icebreaker: “James, the brother of Jesus, and James, the son of Zebedee, preach and are killed by mobs in Jerusalem; Matthew is slain with a sword in Ethiopia; Philip is hanged in Phrygia; Bartholomew flayed alive in Armenia. Andrew is crucified in Achaia, Thomas is run through with a lance in East India, Thaddeus is shot to death with arrows, a cross goes up in Persia for Simon the Zealot and another in Rome for Peter. Matthias is beheaded; only John escapes a martyr’s grace.”—Frank S. Mead, in Draper’s Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), entry 2825. These are men who bore the Cross. Why was it worth so much to them? Would you really do the same today as a testimony to your commitment?

Thought Questions:

1. The Cross is a powerful symbol of what Christianity is all about—pain, suffering, sacrifice, and, ultimately, victory. The Cross was something only one Person in the entire universe could bear. In today’s commercialized world, the Cross is sometimes nothing more than a fashion statement. What does the Cross symbolize? How does society’s perception of the Cross affect its Christian symbolism?

2. Paul is a perfect example of what it means to bear the cross and follow Jesus. This man gave up all he had to follow Jesus. Self never played a role in his walk with the Lord. What does it mean to bear the cross and follow Jesus today? Does God expect you to give up everything as Paul did? In what ways is the bearing of the cross the same today as it was back then? In what ways is it different?

3. What is the role of the Cross according to this week’s memory verse: “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)?

Application Question:
Carrying one’s cross is more than merely accepting Christ and following His example. It is about complete self-denial. It is about dying to your sinful nature and about Christ living through you. In what practical ways can you carry your cross in your everyday life?

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.
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 blacklisted 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?


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?

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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.

“Theyir 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?**
Key Text: *Mark 9:35*

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To stress that service to God is not limited to spiritual superheroes.
2. To demonstrate that our effectiveness as servants of God does not result from our intrinsic goodness.
3. To compare and contrast the standards of God’s kingdom with those of the world.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. Spiritual Failure *(Mark 9:34).*
   A. God can do great things through us when we recognize our dependence on Him.
   B. When we attribute our spiritual accomplishments to our own worthiness, we invite failure.
   C. We cannot advance God’s cause while wrapped up in our own egos.

II. Jesus and Divorce *(Mark 10:2-12).*
   A. Jesus seemingly contradicted Old Testament authority in denying almost all grounds for divorce.
   B. In reality, He confirmed the Old Testament by going back to the ideal of marriage as presented in Genesis.
   C. Jesus’ attitudes on divorce denied then-current attitudes that made the husband the sole person to exercise discretion in such instances.

III. Greatest in the Kingdom *(Mark 9:36, 37).*
   A. Jesus attributed particular value to children, then—as now—the least powerful yet most vulnerable members of society.
   B. His choice of children as models of kingdom citizenship denied human notions of spiritual self-reliance.
   C. Jesus regarded human greatness—wealth, for example—as a spiritual snare.

**Summary:** We want to think our own efforts are “good enough” to please God and reach His kingdom. We create a hierarchy of people who are certainly good enough to be saved, people who are doing “just enough,” and those who are certainly lost. God’s standards, however, are so impossibly high not even the best of us can reach them on our own. Only by depending on God can any of us hope to reach His kingdom.

**COMMENTARY**

The Christian life is not all glory. A genuine disciple is neither overly elated by the cool breeze of the mountaintop nor disheartened by the heat of the valley below. Our study this week reviews
**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?

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**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?

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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?**
TEACHERS COMMENTS

four elements of the Christian life: strength, relationships, family, and attitude toward riches.


On the mountaintop, Peter, James, and John were filled with joy. But discipleship is not all ecstasy. At the bottom of the mountain, Jesus and the disciples noticed that a father had brought his devil-possessed son to be healed by the rest of the disciples. But they could not heal the boy, even though on earlier occasions they had been able to perform such miracles (Mark 6:7, 13). So, Jesus took command and healed the boy. Then He told the disciples it was because of their unbelief (Matt. 17:20) and lack of prayer (Matt. 17:21, Mark 9:29) that they had been unsuccessful.

Every person experiences a constant battle between faith and unbelief, prayerful dependence upon God and confidence in one’s own strength. True discipleship recognizes this battle, keeps self crucified and Christ exalted, and chooses to wrap itself in the strength of faith and prayer. The believing heart and the bended knee bring Heaven’s infinite power to our side, while keeping at bay Satan’s deceptions.


If the Christian’s strength lies in faith and prayer, the quality of Christian life consists of the basic principles Jesus lists in Mark 9:33-50.

1. Be a servant leader. The common concept that leadership consists of being first in power and position began with Lucifer, who said “‘I will ascend . . .’” (Isa. 14:13, 14). In the world, leaders are served by followers; and the greatest leaders are those who have the greatest number of followers. However, “‘it shall not be so among you,’” said Jesus, “‘but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant . . . just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’” (Matt. 20:26, 28, NKJV). This is a revolutionary principle. It leaves no room for pride.

2. Be open to receive (Mark 9:36, 37; see also 10:13-16). Because of their innocence, trust, receptivity, or “immature” behavior, children are often treated as unimportant. However, Christian discipleship demands that we accept each person at the level of his or her maturity then help them to grow.

3. Be inclusive (Mark 9:38-41, 50). Christian relationships should not be marked by exclusion, jealousy, and isolation. Christians may differ in culture, methods of witness, and styles of worship; but these are not to be causes for separation. Without sacrificing the unifying principle of absolute loyalty to Christ and His teachings, we can be friends with all. Just as salt exists to enhance the taste of food, so we should exist to enhance the quality of life and to season the life of
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.

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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?)

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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?**
others with the salt of Christ’s love and life.

4. Be complete in your commitment (Mark 9:42-48). Jesus’ call to the kingdom is so radical it has zero tolerance for sin. Even if it is something as dear as an eye, as important as a foot, or as defining as the mind—it is better to chop it off than to forfeit the kingdom because of it.

The family, like the Sabbath, is rooted in the divine plan and was inaugurated before sin’s entrance on the earth. But the hardness of the human heart and its eagerness to compromise with the world

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Mark 9:14–10:31

1 Most of us, if given a choice, would probably choose to live somewhat removed from the congestion, crime, and complications of modern society (the mountaintop). But most of Jesus’ ministry was in places where He could do the most good—where the concentration of sin and suffering was the highest (the plain). List at least three Bible characters (other than Jesus) who boldly proclaimed truth in teeming, cosmopolitan settings.

2 When it comes to greatness, doesn’t it often seem as if Christians are just as clueless as the world? We honor those whose faces we know from television, books, and personal appearances; we go out of our way to listen to the president of this or vice president of that. Yet, those who tutor unwed mothers, feed the homeless, visit the elderly, counsel the addicts, etc., get barely a mention. If you were going to honor the “truly great” in your congregation (according to Jesus’ definition), who would they be? Name three candidates.

3 Do we need Jesus’ counsel about divorce to know it’s bad? With alimony payments, child support, visitation rights, etc., doesn’t everybody know divorce is a minefield? What practical suggestions will strengthen the relationship between husbands and wives in your congregation? How can you redemptively reach out to people whose lives have been disrupted by the tragedy of divorce?

4 Now, as in Jesus’ time, many people have little regard for children. Yet, for children, Jesus had the most tender regard. How does your congregation show its regard for the “least of these”? What could you do better?
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?
have minimized the Word’s prescription for family. Jesus’ response to divorce returns us to Creation, when God created male and female as a sacred unity, an insoluble oneness. When a man and a woman enter marriage committed to its basic principles of love, unity, and permanence, divorce becomes a question for which the solution is already provided.

IV. The Christian Life: Attitude to Riches.
Jesus’ answer that the rich young ruler should give away all his possessions and follow Him (Mark 10:17-31) was not an indict-

Witnessing

Angela, her husband, Don, and their three children have been active and faithful members of your church for many years. Lately, however, you notice that over the past year Angela and the kids have become withdrawn and uncommunicative. The pastor mentions he has attempted to visit the family on several occasions but can’t get past Don at the front door.

Late one evening the pastor calls and asks you to accompany him to the hospital where Angela has just been admitted. One look at Angela tells you she has been severely beaten. The doctors tell the pastor this isn’t the first time she’s been admitted in similar condition. Later, you learn Angela has regularly been physically abused by Don. The children generally are witnesses to the abuse. To save her life and possibly the lives of her children, Angela separates from Don.

In time she meets a fine Christian man who loves her and her children. He offers to marry her. Angela talks to the pastor, who tells her that only marital infidelity is grounds for divorce. Angela now has tough decisions to make.

What counsel can you share? Describe the appropriate action for Angela and the church to take. Defend your answer.

Speaking of children, Jesus always demonstrated great tenderness and compassion for the littlest of sinners. His example is one to be followed in our homes, our schools, and our churches. Do a bit of soul-searching while reviewing the following questions: Are you satisfied with the amount of resources your local church allocates to children and their needs? What is your reaction to church statistics indicating that nearly half of our children leave the church? What can and are you doing to help children in your immediate neighborhood hear about Jesus? What have you learned from a child this week that has made an impression on you? What do you think a child would say about his or her interaction with you this week? Are you confident you have mirrored Christ in all ways?
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?
ment against riches. The ruler defined his life according to how good a man he was (Mark 10:19, 20). So, he was eager to learn if there was anything else he needed to do in order to be good. His religion was a do-it-yourself religion. But in Christ, there is no room for such.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Lenin, the implementer of communism in the Soviet Union, while meeting with a small group of people in London in the early 1900s, set down these four “totals”:
1. Total acceptance of the cause
2. Total dedication to the cause
3. Total discipline in the cause
4. Total action for the cause

Back then the communist movement was only a handful of people. How quickly that movement spread.

The four totals of communism are very similar to the qualities of good discipleship. If people were willing at one point to be so totally dedicated to communism, why are so few ready to fully commit themselves to being a disciple of Christ?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Professing a total commitment to Christ is easy. But often-times our commitment begins Friday evening and ends at Sabbath sundown. How do we continue to be Seventh-day Adventists when it’s not the seventh day?

2. Jesus preached to all but called only a few. Why do you think this was so? Why are divine expectations made of those who are called by God to serve in a specific area? Are special powers or gifts bestowed upon those called to serve? Explain.

**Application Questions:**

1. How does Jesus’ command “Follow Me” summarize the spirit of discipleship? What are the factors in your life that affect your response to Jesus’ invitation to follow Him?

2. Jesus spent a considerable amount of His time teaching His disciples to be disciples, grooming them for the time when they would be on their own. It was this instruction that enabled them to be effective witnesses after Christ returned to heaven. How can we continue to nurture disciples within our church? What is the church lacking in the area of discipleship?

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 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?
Key Text: Mark 10:33, 34

Teachers Aims:
1. To underline the relationship of Jesus’ final days to His entire life.
2. To emphasize that Jesus’ death was not merely an unfortunate accident.
3. To show the Messianic nature of Jesus’ final acts.

Lesson Outline:
I. Spiritual Blindness (Mark 10:52).
   A. All of us suffer from degrees of spiritual blindness.
   B. Jesus gives us a glimpse of God we would otherwise never have been able to experience.
   C. Jesus’ divinity helps us understand our own lives.

II. Triumphal Entry (Matt. 21:4, 5; Mark 11:2-10).
   A. Jesus emphasized His messiahship by fulfilling Old Testament prophecy.
   B. The cleansing of the temple was a claim of divine authority.
   C. As Messiah, Jesus came to reform religious practices that had become corrupt and meaningless.

III. Cursing the Fig Tree (Mark 11:20-26).
   A. The fig tree symbolizes useless religious beliefs and practices.
   B. Jesus draws Peter’s attention to faith in God and eternity (Mark 11:22-26).
   C. Many of the things we regard as spiritually important may, like the fig tree, be fruitless.

Summary: While we may feel we are conducting our spiritual lives to the best of our ability, Jesus may have something better for us, just as He did for the people of His time. As such, it is our duty to listen to what God is saying to us and not merely to fall into spiritual/religious habits.

COMMENTARY
“Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem” (Mark 10:32, NKJV). So begins our study this week. For the third time (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32) Jesus spoke of His journey to the cross. Each time the account became more grim. Yet, even as the crisis loomed ahead, He dealt with four situations: unholy ambition, intense faith, cross versus crown, and cursing and cleansing.

I. Unholy Ambition (Mark 10:35-45).
Earlier, Jesus had defined greatness in terms of servanthood and warned that those who seek to be first shall actually be last (Mark 9:33-37). Why, then, did James and John ask that Jesus let them sit on the right and left sides of His heavenly throne (Mark 10:35-37)? The request may have been sincere and earnest, but was it not ambi-
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?
tious and unacceptable? Christians should not demand that God do what they wish. Instead, they are to approach Him with the attitude of Not my will, but thine be done. As Jesus’ cousins, James and John may have expected Him to grant their request. They were probably better off than others socially. (Their father was rich enough to employ servants; see Mark 1:20.) But they failed to realize one crucial principle: “In the kingdom of God, position is not gained through favoritism. It is not earned, nor is it received through an arbitrary bestowal. It is the result of character. The crown and the throne are the tokens of a condition attained; they are the tokens of self-conquest through our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 549.

Jesus is our example. “ ‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’ ” (Mark 10:45, NKJV).

II. Intense Faith (Mark 10:46-52).

Jesus was going to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. A great multitude followed Him; but no crowd was ever too large to keep Him from noticing a cry of faith. This time the cry came from Bartimaeus, a blind beggar. Physically challenged, socially ostracized, poverty-stricken, and condemned as a sinner, he stopped the Lord of the universe on Main Street. That is the beauty and wonder of the gospel: Jesus cares for each individual. Neither His impending agony nor the noise of the crowd could keep Jesus from meeting the needs of one helpless person.

Bartimaeus was a beggar. He had nothing. It was his heart that conquered his circumstance. Faith requires neither eyes nor ears, feet nor hands. All it needs is a heart yearning to connect with its Maker.

“His persevering faith is rewarded. . . . All who feel their need of Christ as did blind Bartimaeus, and who will be as earnest and determined as he was, will, like him, receive the blessing which they crave.”—Ellen G. White comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1111.


The third situation in this week’s study is a sensitive one: the crowd’s eagerness to make Jesus the king, and His steadfastness to the Cross. The people, it seemed, had waited too long for this occasion. The Miracle Maker was certainly worth the coronation, for with a word He could conquer the Roman army and establish David’s throne. They expressed their anticipation of such events with loud Hosannas (vs. 9, NKJV). Jesus, however, “remained true to the humble lot He had accepted. The burden of humanity He must bear until His life was given for the life of the world.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 571.
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!

“Howseanna. Gr. hoshanna, 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?
Our concepts of Jesus are limited by our selfish desires. Jesus, however, had a wider view. The people expected Him to proclaim Himself as the Messiah of an earthly kingdom. But His concepts of the Messiah and His kingdom were totally different from their concepts. The bearing of the Cross must precede the exclamation of the crown.

IV. Cursing and Cleansing (Mark 11:12-24).
Mark 11:12-24 presents the fourth situation for our study: the cursing of a fruitless fig tree and the cleansing of the temple. Fruit

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Mark 10:32–11:26

1 When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by, he made a scene: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47, NIV). In spite of the crowd’s scorn, he would not be silenced until he had Jesus’ attention. His persistence paid off; Jesus restored his sight. Scripture’s testimony is: “My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19, NIV). What does this verse say to you?

2 The triumphal entry (Mark 11:1-11) was one of the few times in His public ministry when Jesus allowed His followers to honor Him as the Messiah. The way and manner He entered Jerusalem were a fulfillment of prophecy. Yet, Jesus knew that before the week was over He’d be abandoned by His friends, condemned by His enemies, and crucified. What misconceptions about Jesus still persist among Christians and non-Christians? What can we do to set the record straight?

3 “Righteous indignation” is rarely both. What gave Jesus the right to disrupt the temple services by overturning the money changers’ tables? How is it different from the indignation we might use to overcome evil?

4 Ellen White said, “The cursing of the fig tree was an acted parable.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 582. She went on to say it was a warning against pride and self-sufficiency and the absence of humility, love, and benevolence. Spend a few moments reflecting on the wealth and talent represented by our church members and institutions around the world. Compare those with the simple kingdom principles demonstrated by members. NOTE: One isn’t good and the other bad; we need both to carry out Christ’s commission.
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?
bearing is a necessary part of life. At the personal level, one must be rooted in the soil of faith in order to bear the fruit of the Spirit. Believers must repent, worship their Maker, praise His name, and commit themselves to His service. If all we have, however, is the lush foliage of pretension, Jesus must step in! With justice on His lips, with a whip in His hands (John 2:15), the Lord must curse the barren fig tree and cleanse the temple from its unholy practices.

Where faith in God is deep and abiding, the fig tree shall bear

**Witnessing**

In our study this week the author speaks of the intense spiritual darkness that surrounds those who have not yet found Jesus Christ as their personal Friend and Companion. That imagery is then contrasted with the explosion of intense light that envelops the sinner at the time of spiritual conversion. The light leads the convert into a life modeled on Christ’s own example.

Many of the miracles Jesus performed during His ministry here on earth involved improving the quality of life for the recipient. Jesus was deeply touched by human frailty and suffering brought on by the unrelenting bombardment of Satan and his evil angels. The Son of God was moved to heal the sick, the maimed, the crippled, and the demented. Physical, mental, and emotional well-being were often restored through the loving and compassionate nature of Christ.

Today, our church operates a vast health-care network around the globe. Countless lives have been touched and improved through this people-to-people ministry. Circling the globe are Seventh-day Adventist–owned and operated hospitals, clinics, medical launches, rehabilitation centers, and so forth, staffed by dedicated and caring Adventist health-care professionals. Thousands of men, women, and children from all cultures and backgrounds, believers and nonbelievers alike, daily experience the healing touch of this ministry located in their own community.

Ministering to the children of the world are the thousands of committed Adventist educators who serve in the church’s educational system in order to make a difference in children’s lives, one child at a time. These foot soldiers in Christ’s army are dedicated in their determination to make a difference through the education of the mind, heart, and soul.

Health care and education: These are just two areas of the church in action, two areas of ministry where your contribution as a volunteer or paid employee would be invaluable. Your involvement will make a difference in the quality of life for those you reach. You will be a light bearer modeling Jesus, the Light of the world.
Jesus Curses the Fig Tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-26 \(\text{see also Matt. 21:18-22, Luke 13:6-9}\)).

**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?
fruit, and the temple shall become the dwelling place of God. Genuine faith has the power to open the doors of heaven, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** What would you do if you were told you had only 24 hours to live? Whom would you see? What kinds of regrets would you have about the life you’ve led up until that moment? Would your last 24 hours be similar to your other days? If that were so, what kind of statement of your life would that last day make? What if that last day is crammed with trying to make up for the other wasted or lost days of your life?

**Thought Questions:**
1. Jesus’ triumphant ride into Jerusalem was a fulfillment of Zechariah’s Messianic prophecy. What other reasons did Jesus have for entering the city this way?
2. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He was met by a crowd shouting Hosanna, urging Him to be their King. Yet, less than a week later, many from the same crowd were screaming to have Him crucified. What made these people change so quickly? Why is the human race so fickle?
3. In Jewish tradition a king riding a colt symbolizes a peaceful coming, while riding a horse symbolizes war. Jesus the Conqueror of evil chose to ride a colt. Why? This same Jesus is also referred to as both a Lamb and a Lion. Explain this apparent contradiction of terms. How do they relate to Christ’s character?

**Application Questions:**
1. During Christ’s last week, His mind was filled and worn with so much care. So many things were to occur in such a short time. Yet, on His way to Jerusalem, He took the time to stop and heal Bartimaeus. In today’s busy world, what can we learn about priorities through Jesus’ example during His last days?
2. The final days of Jesus’ life were filled with urgency. There was so much work to be done. In spite of this stressful atmosphere, Jesus maintained the ability to distinguish between what was urgent and what was important. He knew cleansing the temple was important. He knew that healing Bartimaeus was important. What is the difference between the urgent and the important? How does the urgent sometimes get in the way of accomplishing what we are meant to do?

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.
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?
Key Text: *Mark 11:27-33*

Teachers Aims:
1. To understand why Jesus faced hostility.
2. To emphasize that Jesus’ critics were aware of their deceptive behavior.
3. To stress that Jesus ministered even to those who attacked Him.

Lesson Outline:

I. Jesus and John *(Mark 11:30).*
   A. Unlike His critics, Jesus used words to clarify matters.
   B. John’s prophetic gift was generally recognized, and he, in turn, recognized Jesus.
   C. Jesus’ critics refused to recognize the truth, even when directly confronted with it.

II. The Plot Against Jesus *(Mark 12:13, 14).*
   A. The alliance of the Pharisees and the Herodians illustrates the nature of their opposition to Jesus.
   B. His critics were willing to falsely affirm Him in order to undermine Him.
   C. This episode illustrates the need to be aware of our speech and our tendency to be fooled by flattery.

III. Trick Questions, Honest Answers *(Mark 12:18-27).*
   A. For Jesus, a mere knowledge of what Scripture says is not the same as storing the words of Scripture in our hearts.
   B. Like the Pharisees, Jesus believed in the resurrection of the dead.
   C. Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus saw those who believed in Him as taking part in eternal life now.

Summary: The Pharisees and other interest groups Jesus faced were convinced He meant them harm. Hence, they were willing to do anything to undermine Him. In spite of this, Jesus continued to seek their salvation. He longs for us to follow His example.

COMMENTARY

This week we study five questions *(Mark 11:27–12:44)* Jesus dealt with in His confrontation with the religious leaders of His day. The encounter took place in the temple precincts on the Tuesday of Passion Week.

I. The Question of Authority *(Mark 11:27-33).*

The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders were behind the plot to trap Jesus with cunning questions. From these groups were chosen the Sanhedrin, with whom rested all religious authority. Hence the
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?
question: “‘By what authority are You doing these things?’” (vs. 28, NKJV). “These things” referred to Jesus’ cleansing the temple (vss. 15-17). Jesus offered to answer provided His questioners answered Him on another point: “‘The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me’” (vs. 30, NKJV). The religious leaders found themselves in a dilemma.Attributing John’s ministry to God would have led to the next question: Then, why did you reject him? Saying that John was a deluded man would have angered the people, for they loved John’s ministry. But the Jews said they did not know. Because the Jewish leaders evaded His question, Jesus refused to answer theirs.

II. The Question of Stewardship (Mark 12:1-12, 41-44).

Stewardship is often misunderstood as a matter of money. But more than money, it involves a relationship of faithfulness and total surrender, as illustrated in the parable of the wicked tenants (vss. 1-12) and the story of the widow’s mite (vss. 41-44).

The parable of the wicked servants begins with God, the vineyard Owner. God entrusts to the tenants (the religious leaders) the vineyard (Israel), with the hope they will be faithful in their work and return to the Master His due. At vintage time, the Owner sends His servants (the prophets) to collect His due. But the tenants reject the servants with violence and death. The Owner finally sends His only Son. But the tenants kill the Son, hoping to become owners of the vineyard. Now the question from Jesus: “‘What will the owner of the vineyard do?’” (vs. 9, NKJV). The answer is grave: Rejection of the Son ensures one’s own rejection.

III. The Question of Tax Payment (Mark 12:13-17).

Now it is the turn of the Pharisees and Herodians. The two groups, generally hostile to each other, joined forces to ask Jesus: “‘Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?’” (vs. 14, NKJV). The question raised a burning issue, aimed at trapping Jesus. If Jesus had answered Yes, it would have pitted Him against the Jews who resented the Roman rule. If He had answered No, they would have made Him face the charge of sedition.

Instead, Jesus asked for a coin and posed a counterquestion: “‘Whose image and inscription is this?’” (vs. 16, NKJV). Caesar’s, of course. Then came Jesus’ answer: “‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’” (vs. 17, NKJV).

God or Caesar? The question had persisted throughout history. As citizens of this world we have certain duties; but as citizens of heaven, we have even higher obligations. Thus, Jesus turned the question from a choice between God and Caesar into a call to live on the higher ground of worship and service to the Creator.
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?
IV. The Question of Resurrection (Mark 12:18-27).

The Sadducees placed before Jesus an imaginary case of a woman who married seven brothers, after each one died without an issue. Then they asked the question: “In the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be?” (Mark 12:23, NKJV).

Jesus gave a two-part answer. First, on the question of marital relation in heaven: “Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Isaiah 5:1-7, Mark 11:27–12:44

1 “Our problem is not so much that we don’t know what we should do,” said Peter Marshall, one of the twentieth century’s great preachers. “We know perfectly well . . . but we don’t want to do it.”—Mr. Jones, Meet the Master (New York: F. H. Revell, 1949), p. 128. How can we avoid the fate of the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day who allowed their prejudices to keep them from embracing new spiritual insights?

2 The Jewish religious leaders, hearing the parable of the tenants (Mark 12:1-12), “looked for a way to arrest [Jesus] because they knew he had spoken the parable against them” (vs. 12, NIV). How would an honest seeker after truth have responded to this parable? Can you think of any applications that are similar to situations we face today?

3 In His audience there were surely people eager to anoint Jesus as the Messiah, just as there were certainly people who wanted to be rid of Roman oppression. Yet, Jesus encouraged allegiance to both Rome and God (Mark 12:17). How practical is that advice today? Under what circumstances could it be argued that human laws could be ignored for the sake of being obedient to God? Give at least three specific examples.

4 The question, “‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’” (Mark 12:28, NIV) is a typically pharisaical question. We still debate the “finer” points of obedience. (Is killing someone in self-defense as bad as killing someone accidentally?) Jesus seemed to lead His listeners away from specific behaviors to principled behaviors. For example: What is the spiritual principle behind buying a house? Watching television? Choosing a mate? Deciding where to vacation? Do the same principles apply to every person in every situation?
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?
angels in heaven’” (vss. 24, 25, NKJV). The Sadducees were guilty of a basic fallacy: They imagined eternal life to be an extension of earthly life. In that they were wrong. The postresurrection life is not an extension but a transformation, an entirely new life free from sin.

The second part of Jesus’ answer dealt with resurrection, and His answer was unequivocal: “‘You are therefore greatly mistaken’” (vs. 27, NKJV). Why should resurrection be impossible? The One who created the humans can also resurrect them.

V. The Question of the Essential (Mark 12:28-34).

The fifth question came from a scribe: “‘Which is the first commandment of all?’” (vs. 28, NKJV). The Pharisees had identified some six hundred thirteen commandments, and so the question went beyond the Ten Commandments. Jesus’ answer (Deut. 6:4, 5; 11:13-21; Mark 12:29, 30) defined not only the greatest commandment but also the very purpose of life: to believe that God is One and to love Him supremely “‘with all your heart, with all your

Witnessing

How do you define the word neighbor? Friendly? Nosy? Hostile? Complainer? Helpful? Friend? Enemy? However you personally define the word, a neighbor is someone who lives in very close proximity to you. Someone who, potentially, has a direct impact, positive or negative, on your life. A good neighbor will brighten your day; a bad neighbor can send you into near depression. Good neighbors “sell” a neighborhood; conversely, bad neighbors depreciate the neighborhood.

In the American Old West, cattle drivers and shepherds made poor neighbors—hence the phrase fences make good neighbors was born. Cattle drivers needed large, open areas in order to provide ample grazing for their cattle. They also needed clear trails to drive the cattle to market. So, fences were an abomination to them. On the other hand, shepherds didn’t want their animals to wander. They preferred fencing in the animals to keep them contained. Years of battling each other turned the two groups into bitter enemies. In the end, the law was required to get involved to bring peace, since the groups were incapable of doing it for themselves.

“Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mark 12:31). That’s not so easy at times when your relationship with your neighbor is suffering an all-time low. Yet, Jesus tells us this commandment is second only to loving God.

“Love thy neighbor as thyself.” You’re doing all you can to prepare yourself for Jesus’ soon return, aren’t you? So, have you shared the plan of redemption with your neighbor in the ultimate act of brotherly or sisterly love?
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.
soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength’” (Mark 12:30, NKJV).

But Jesus did not stop with the first commandment. He told the scribe that love to God has an inescapable corollary: “‘And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’”’.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “Heathen people who observe brotherly love of Christians toward one another marveled at what they saw and cried out, ‘Behold, how they love one another!’ The renowned Roman lawyer Marcus Minucius Felix, who lived in the second century, became a true Christian, and he testified of the early Christians: ‘They loved one another, even before knowing one another (personally).’ Of course, many heathen people remained what they were and scoffed at Christianity. For example, Lucian, who also lived in the second century, and sneeringly wrote of them: ‘Their Master (Jesus Christ) has made them believe that they are all brethren.’” —Bible Illustrator (Parson’s Technology, 1997).

Thought Questions:

1. There are families of murder victims and victims of other heinous crimes who are known to go beyond forgiveness. What do you think their reasons are for doing so? According to Jesus, is going the extra mile of forgiveness really necessary? Are such acts a result of guilt or of true conviction to loving their neighbor as themselves?

2. In His dealings with the Pharisees, Jesus was always put in a defensive position. He was made to justify His beliefs and actions. The Pharisees singled Him out because He was different from the other teachers of His time. Similarly, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is different from the other Protestant churches of its time. Our beliefs and actions also are questioned by the majority. How are we to react to this? How can we follow Jesus’ example?

Application Questions:

1. In today’s world showing love and compassion to strangers can often invite danger. What role, if any, does common sense play in our attempts to live the commandment “Love thy neighbor as thyself”? When would it be better to act collectively rather than individually?

2. Jesus never simply created rules and commandments as the Pharisees did. What can we learn about effective evangelism from the way Christ presented the law?
**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.
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.
**Key Text:** Mark 13:4

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To stress the importance of Jesus’ return and the end of this earth.
2. To explore how Jesus’ statements on future events applied both to His day and ours.
3. To emphasize that we should look with hope to Jesus’ return.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. The Disciples’ Questions *(Mark 13:1, 2).*
   A. Jesus’ disciples associated the end of the world with the fall of Jerusalem.
   B. In answering their questions, Jesus makes clear that the fall of Jerusalem was an end, but not *the* end.
   C. The seemingly random catastrophes that occur as part of end-time events advance God’s plan.

II. The Fall of Jerusalem *(Mark 13:9-12).*
   A. On Jesus’ authority, Daniel’s abomination of desolation *(Dan. 9:27)* refers to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.
   B. The fact that the early Christians fled Jerusalem during the later siege indicates they knew and obeyed Jesus’ words.
   C. The fall of Jerusalem can be viewed as the result of disobeying God.

III. The End of the World *(Mark 13:24-26).*
   A. The fall of Jerusalem symbolizes the end of the world.
   B. Not all of Jesus’ statements can be taken as referring to the fall of Jerusalem. Some of them refer to the final end.
   C. While it is important to be aware of the signs of the end, it is more important to focus on Jesus’ return.

**Summary:** As followers of Jesus, we need to take seriously the end of the world and the Second Coming. Jesus often preached about both; and both give meaning to His life and ministry. At the same time, we must focus on the here and now, because the kingdom of God is among us.

**Commentary**

Mark 13 is one of the difficult portions of the book. Its difficulty lies in understanding Jesus’ prediction concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and His return. Events relating to the two events are placed in such a way it is hard to separate them. Historic distance from the destruction of Jerusalem and anticipation of the Second Coming should lead us only to one certainty: Just as Jesus’ prediction regarding the temple came true 40 years later, so the prediction of His return will come true.
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.
Our lesson deals with the disciples’ question in verse 4 and Jesus’ answer.

I. The Disciples’ Question.

As Jesus was leaving the temple with the disciples, they expressed their wonder at the imposing structure. Herod the Great began its construction 15 years before Jesus was born; and the entire complex, occupying almost one-sixth of the city, was not finished until about A.D. 63. During Jesus’ time its main structure was probably complete. Some of its stones were huge, measuring 25 by 8 by 12 feet. “The Jews were convinced of the permanence of this magnificent structure, not only because of the stability of construction, but also because it represented God’s presence among them.” —Life Application Bible Commentary: Mark, p. 370.

The awe the disciples expressed over the temple (Mark 13:1) prompted Jesus to say that “‘not one stone shall be left upon another’” (vs. 2, NKJV). This prediction caused Peter, James, John, and Andrew to ask: “‘When will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?’” (vs. 4, NKJV). “These things” in the first query referred to the temple’s destruction. “These things” in the second question are clarified by Matthew: “‘What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’” (Matt. 24:3, NKJV). The second question dealt with the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and the disciples wondered whether there was a relationship between this and the destruction of the temple.

II. Jesus’ Answer: On the Temple’s Destruction.

Jesus’ answer called for a shift in the disciples’ understanding of the kingdom. While the Jewish hope of the kingdom focused on the temple and the restoration of David’s throne in Jerusalem, the hope that Christ offered centered on His glorious return, the precise timing of which “‘no one knows . . . but only the Father’” (Mark 13:32, NKJV). Thus, the apostles described the Second Coming as the Christian’s “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13), and it is this that dominates the book of Revelation, written some twenty years after the destruction of the temple.

Jesus’ answer regarding the temple’s destruction contained two cautionary notes: “‘Take heed that no one deceives you’” (Mark 13:5, NKJV) and “‘the end is not yet’” (vs. 7, NKJV). Because we can draw no clear line regarding which of these two events relates to the end of the Jewish nation as God’s chosen people and which to the end of the age, it is important not to allow the crises of history to undermine our faith or cause us to speculate regarding the end of the age.
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 destruction of the temple was one of the most cruel manifestations of inhumanity and savagery. The famine, persecution, plunder, destruction, earthquakes, and death predicted in Mark caused unimaginable misery for the Jewish people. The siege and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 left dead nearly a million Jews. The temple itself experienced one fulfillment of the “abomination of desolation” (Mark 13:14; see also Dan. 9:27, 11:31), when the invading Romans not only destroyed the temple but set up

Inductive Bible Study


1. The time of the end. For many Adventists those words conjure up negative images of religious persecution, cold-blooded violence, and spiritual deception. Yet, the end result is overwhelmingly positive. Contrast the positive and negative aspects of the following human experiences that typically end gloriously and compare them with Jesus’s return: (1) getting married, (2) having a baby, (3) taking final exams, (4) building a house, (5) training for competition.

2. Jesus’s description of the events of the last days has warned and encouraged believers for nearly two thousand years. As you think back on the different epochs of the Christian church (apostolic, Roman, Dark Ages, Reformation, modern), what benefit do you think Christians received from these passages at each stage? How were they different, depending on the situation? How were they the same?

3. More important than knowing the *when* of Jesus’ return is knowing the *how* of being ready for it. What Bible promise have you claimed, and what life decisions have you made to ensure you’ll meet the Lord in peace? Is it boastful to claim to be ready for Jesus’ return?

4. What role, if any, do prophetic charts and graphs have on our witness as Christians who are waiting for the Lord’s return? If you could focus only on one to be prepared for Jesus’ return, would you choose (1) the Old Testament or the New Testament? (2) the Gospels or the Epistles? (3) the prophecies or the psalms? For each option, explain your choice in one sentence.

5. Do you believe Jesus is coming soon? Explain your definition of “soon.”
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 christs 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?
pagan idols on its holy precincts, and eventually, in A.D. 135, erected a temple for Jupiter.

III. Jesus’ Answer: On the End of the Age.

Although the events predicted in Mark 13:6-19 had their primary application to the destruction of Jerusalem, they also are applicable to the end of the age. Jerusalem’s destruction symbolizes the destruction of the world at the end of this age. As such, the church will face its own spiritual and physical calamities (Mark 13:6, 9-13). But Christians ought to face these as a call to be on “watch” (vs. 9) for “the end is not yet” (vs. 7, NKJV). Regarding the end, Jesus predicted several specifics:

Witnessing

Many Adventists find it difficult to talk about the end of time. Why? Perhaps it’s because they’re happy with life here on planet Earth. Or maybe thinking about the end of time brings vivid images of such horrible suffering and fear that it’s just easier to adopt an “I’ll worry about it when it happens” mentality. Living in the land of denial can be temporarily peaceful, but at some point in time, reality becomes just that—reality. When that happens and we’re not prepared, it can be worse than we ever expected. Whatever the reason for not focusing on the end time and events leading up to it, if Adventists can’t prepare themselves, how can others—nonbelievers—be warned in time?

Christ has given His followers a road map for the end time. He has pointed out important landmarks, detours, roadblocks, and straightaways that His people need to follow in order to navigate through to His second coming. He not only wants us to use the road map, He expects us to share it every day of our lives with fellow travelers. They need to have an opportunity to pull over and ask for directions.

You need to create in those around you an awareness of the danger ahead. How do you do that without causing hostility or unnecessary fear? First, begin each day with prayer, committing that day to God’s service. Then ask Him to give you opportunities during the day to witness to others. Ask Him to help you recognize these chances and give you the right words to speak so you encourage, not discourage; interest, not disinterest. Promise Him you will make this a priority throughout the day. He will provide the softening of the heart others will need in order to benefit from your witnessing attempts.

The unfolding of end-time events, although scary, is further proof that the salvation story is absolutely true. How blessed we are to have the road map of all time!
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?**
“‘The gospel must first be preached to all the nations’” (Mark 13:10, NKJV). Fulfilling this commission amid persecution and crises is a sign the end is near (Matt. 24:14, Rev. 14:6-12).

**False christs and prophets will appear** with deviant teachings, miracles, and signs, that, if it were possible, would deceive the very elect. Some of those false teachings include that Jesus will come in secret (Mark 13:21, 22, 26).

The nearness of the end will be marked by the persecution of the saints and cosmic upheavals affecting the sun, moon, and stars (vss. 19, 24, 25; see also Rev. 6:12-14). Increasing instability indicates God is about to establish His kingdom forevermore.

**No one knows the time of Jesus’ coming** (Mark 13:32). This makes time setting futile, the need for repentance crucial, and watching and waiting essential. Christ’s coming will be so unexpected there will be no time to get ready at the last moment. Therefore, be ready now (Mark 13:34-37).

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### Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** The font that newspapers use for astounding events is called “second coming.” These are large, heavy black letters reserved for only the BIGGEST front-page news—such as the 9/11 tragedy and the assassination of a president. One day humankind will witness the great event for which the font was named! The Lord’s second coming will surely be a front-page headline event spread across the sky for every eye to see.

**Thought Questions:**

1. News is BIG only when it is relevant to the person receiving it. The Second Coming will be BIG news only when it becomes relevant. How can we work toward making the Second Coming more relevant to the many who have yet to hear about Christianity?

2. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have heard all our lives that Christ is coming soon. But in more than one hundred fifty years of preaching of His soon return, He is still not here. How can we account for the delay to a nonbeliever? Does this discount our belief in any way? Explain.

**Application Question:**

To constantly be on the lookout for the “signs” of His coming takes away from living for Christ today. Waiting for the Second Coming is not about recognizing the day but about being ready for the day. How do you know when and if you are ready?

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.
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.
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?
Key Text: Mark 14:24, 25

Teachers Aims:
1. To understand the depth of Christ’s sacrifice.
2. To stress that while Christ’s sacrifice was necessary, individual actors in the events chose to do what they did.
3. To encourage us to persevere in our faith despite our inadequacies.

Lesson Outline:

I. Beginnings of Betrayal (Mark 14:10, 11).
   A. Judas demonstrates how we are all vulnerable to temptation.
   B. Judas’ behavior was to some extent reinforced by the other disciples.
   C. At almost any point, Judas still could have been saved.

II. The Last Supper (Mark 14:22).
   A. The rite commemorating the Last Supper (Communion) is perhaps the most universal Christian practice.
   B. Jesus connected the Last Supper with His death.
   C. The hope of the Second Coming is central to understanding Communion and Christ’s sacrifice.

III. Vigil and Arrest (Mark 14:32-49).
   A. Christ’s agony in anticipation of His impending separation from the Father was real.
   B. The seeming uncertainty of His situation forced Jesus to rely on faith.
   C. Peter’s initial failure occurred because he was tempted to trust his own strength.

Summary: In affirming Jesus’ divinity, it is important to remember that His death and suffering were real. We, just as much as the people and events surrounding Jesus, are participants in the causes and effects of these most important events in history.

COMMENTSARY

Our study this week (Mark 14:1-50) presents various human responses to the Cross. It also studies the Lord’s Supper as a memorial to Jesus’ death and Jesus’ struggle in Gethsemane.

I. The Cross: Human Responses.

Our lesson records three possible responses to the Cross.

Acceptance (Mark 14:3-9). In Simon’s house, Mary of Bethany broke “an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard” (vs. 3, NKJV) with which to anoint Jesus, thus honoring His death.

Her action aroused instant criticism. Why this waste? cried
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 *(I 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?
some, with Judas leading the attack (see John 12:4, 5). How many poor could have been helped? But money is no measure of the heart’s gratitude. Jesus saw in Mary’s act her acceptance of the Cross and defined her devotion as one who anointed His body for burial (Mark 14:8). “Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 568.

**Betrayal.** Jesus’ recognition of Mary was the final act that led Judas “to the chief priests to betray Him” (Mark 14:10, NKJV). Judas’s betrayal was slow and imperceptible. Self dominated Judas so much that discipleship for him was just a way to achieve one’s own glory. All He could see was money; all he could sense was the immediate. He was totally insensitive to the truth that life consists of more than the material. The kingdom of Judas had no room for the Cross. And so betrayal.

**Failure.** When Jesus predicted Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed twice, Peter persisted that He would not and that he was even ready to die with Jesus (Mark 14:27-31). Peter was too self-confident and impulsive to recognize the perils of discipleship or the power of the tempter. When the time came, Peter not only denied ever knowing Jesus but “began to curse and to swear” to that effect (vss. 66-72). Remorse, however, followed denial; and Peter wept bitterly. Tears of repentance are a good place for us to start again. Peter did just that, and what an apostle of the Cross he became.

**II. This Is My Body; This Is My Blood.**

Jesus founded the Lord’s Supper on the eve of the Cross. The Supper is a reminder that “the same night in which He was betrayed” (1 Cor. 11:23, NKJV) He became the Paschal Lamb. The bread and the wine are symbols of His body about to be broken and His blood about to be shed for the remission of sins (Mark 14:24; see also Matt. 26:28).

Jesus’ assertion that His blood was “‘shed for many’” (Mark 14:24) is crucial to experiencing and appreciating salvation. His blood speaks about sin. Sin is real. It is costly. Sin’s grip is so immense and deadly that forgiveness of it and freedom from its power and guilt are impossible without the “precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:19).

As He concluded the Supper, Jesus vowed not to drink of the vine until they were together again in the Father’s kingdom (Matt. 26:29, NKJV). This vow gives the Lord’s Supper an eschatological thrust. With our experience firmly rooted in the Cross, we anticipate the Second Coming.

**III. Gethsemane: Accepting the Cup.**

Gethsemane was the last battle Jesus fought before the Cross. The importance of this battle lay in the temptation that even then He
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).*

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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?

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could choose to return to the Father. Nothing could have stopped Him, for He had not sinned. But Jesus was not on a self-discovery mission. His work was commanded by the Godhead, and as part of the Trinity He chose to take upon Himself the weakness of human flesh, and in that flesh defeat Satan.

Gethsemane is a series of lessons on spiritual survival in the midst of crisis. First, it shows us the place of prayer in our relationship with God. Only prayer can connect us with Him in order to do His will. “ ‘Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will’ ”

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Mark 14:1-50, John 18:1-11

1. The woman who anointed Jesus’ feet (Mark 14:3-9) is the story of someone so passionate about grace that she does something totally impetuous. Impetuous is not a word most people would use to describe Adventists (systematic, maybe). Is impetuousity celebrated or condemned in your congregation? What kind of spontaneity would your congregation encourage? What would it discourage?

2. It’s possible Judas’s motive in betraying Christ was an attempt to force Jesus into defending Himself by exercising His divine prerogatives and establishing His kingdom. If so, Judas seriously misinterpreted the nature of the kingdom Jesus came to establish. In the last two thousand years, Christians have a history of using unchristian methods to ostensibly build up God’s kingdom. What kind of kingdom does God want to establish in our lives? In our communities? How can we ensure that our methods are in harmony with Christ’s character?

3. Let there be no doubt: Peter meant it when he told Jesus, “ ‘Even if all fall away, I will not’ ” (Mark 14:29, NIV). But Peter didn’t know himself as well as Jesus knew him. When we stray from doing God’s will, we don’t often do it deliberately; we just don’t understand ourselves. What have you found the most helpful in seeing yourself as God sees you? How has that been helpful in your spiritual development?

4. The word Jesus used to address His Father, Abba, is an endearing term reserved for one of the most intimate human relationships—that of a parent and child. In what ways has God demonstrated His closeness to you? At what times in your life have you felt His nearness?
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 utter 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?
(Mark 14:36, NKJV). What is this cup Jesus dreaded? Christ’s cup “symbolized neither the physical pain of being flogged and crucified, nor the mental distress of being despised and rejected . . . but rather the spiritual agony of bearing the sins of the world, in other words, of enduring the divine judgment which those sins deserved.”—John Stott, The Cross of Christ (England: Intervarsity Press, 1986), p. 76.

Second, Gethsemane acknowledges that a substantial relationship with God is essential in facing any crisis. A person must be able to say, “The Lord is my shepherd” before he or she can affirm, “I shall not want.”

Witnessing

It leaves a bitter, bitter taste in your mouth. You see “red” because the raw, blinding anger coats everything around you. You may start to plot your own brand of revenge. Hurt washes over you. It seems capable of swallowing you up. You vow to never let someone get close enough to you to ever be able to do that to you again. You may begin to keep people at arms’ length; that way, you minimize the possibility of hurt. All these reactions, and more, are common responses to learning you’ve been betrayed.

Although our Lord suffered greatly as a result of a treacherous act of betrayal at the hand of one of His own disciples, He did not display a typical human response. Rather, He acknowledged the act (even while accepting Judas’s kiss of death in the process) in a nonthreatening manner and urged others around Him to do the same. His example often seems to be a hard one to follow.

Aren’t we guilty of the act of betrayal ourselves at times? Absolutely not, you might say. However, whenever we find excuses not to attend church, aren’t we deceiving God? When we miss out on the many blessings associated with faithful tithing, aren’t we defrauding God? When we fail to use a witnessing opportunity He has provided us, aren’t we reneging on God? When we refuse to use our spiritual gifts as God would have us do, especially in the area of ministering to nonbelievers, aren’t we wasting God’s resources that He has entrusted to us?

As Peter did, we may deny our Lord, but our Lord will not deny us. He will not separate Himself from us; we must withdraw from Him for separation to occur. He has assured us He will forgive our repeated failures when they are accompanied by sincere prayers of contrition coming from the heart. Those who do not yet have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ need to hear His promises and His plan of redemption. God is looking to us for help in sharing His love and heavenly message. Let us daily answer His call to serve.
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?
Third, Gethsemane is a call to renounce self and to accept God’s will, even when that will proves to be a bitter cup. “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. . . . He might say, Let the transgressor receive the penalty of his sin, and I will go back to My Father.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 690. But He chose to fulfill the mission for which He came.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Reflect on this prayer: “Thank you, Father, for these tears that have carried me to the depth of your love. How could I have known your fullness without the emptiness, your acceptance without the rejection, your forgiveness without my failure, our togetherness without that dreadful loneliness. You have brought me to Gethsemane, and oh, the joy of finding you already there! Amen.”—Bonnie Barrows Thomas, in *Draper’s Book of Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), entry 1512.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Judas has always been thought of as a bad guy, the man who betrayed Jesus, a traitor. But consider his intentions: Judas believed his actions would effectively force Jesus into a proactive role of establishing His kingdom. He believed his actions were justified. Why do you think Judas could not see beyond his perspective? Identify areas in the church where the Judas syndrome could be repeated.

2. Jesus’ reason for coming to this earth was to die for our sins. Monomania is fierce passion for one thing. Could Jesus be considered a monomaniac? Did He take on human form ONLY to save us from sin? If so, why did He heal the sick, recruit disciples, and tell parables? Why didn’t He just come down, die, and leave? Explain.

**Application Question:**

In His darkest moment Jesus retreated to a quiet place to connect with His Father. He used prayer as a means of escape from the hardship and pain of reality. Compare and contrast prayer with the avenues of escape the world offers. How can prayer truly be a means of escape, as well as comfort? Identify the quiet places in your life.

“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.
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?
**Key Text:** Mark 14:62

**Teachers Aims:**

1. To stress that our own sense of religiosity can deceive us.
2. To emphasize that Christ, a sinless Being, died as our Substitute.
3. To show that Christ experienced what we, as sinners, would otherwise experience.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. Trial** *(Mark 14:56-61).*

A. Jesus’ trial was unfair and illegal.
B. Jesus’ divinity was an offense to the priests’ religion.
C. Only Pilate, a pagan known for his cruelty, was interested in saving Jesus.

**II. Suffering** *(Mark 15:16-32).*

A. Christ on the cross became sin and experienced eternal separation from God—the second death.
B. Only the reality of Christ’s spiritual suffering enabled Him to be our Substitute.
C. Human attempts to understand the atonement are inadequate.

**III. Death** *(Mark 15:33-39).*

A. The crucified Jesus experienced real despair. He could not see the successful end.
B. This despair is identical to what unsaved sinners will feel when they realize they are doomed.
C. At the moment of His physical death, Jesus knew He had victory over Satan.

**Summary:** To accomplish our salvation, Jesus had to experience what we, as condemned sinners, were meant to experience—despair and hopelessness. As our Substitute, He became one of us.

**COMMENTARY**

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

This week let us contemplate three of those closing scenes in Jesus’ life: before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, and on the cross.

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?
I. Jesus Before the Sanhedrin.

Jesus’ trial before Jerusalem’s religious leaders was a farce. They already had concluded He was guilty and must die (Mark 14:1), but even the unscrupulous needed the pretense of a trial. Moses had prescribed that no one can be convicted without evidence and without at least two witnesses whose testimonies agreed (Deut. 19:15). Finding no evidence, the religious leaders sought for witnesses. With money they bribed false witnesses “to accuse Jesus of inciting rebellion and seeking to establish a separate government. But their testimony proved to be vague and contradictory. Under examination they falsified their own statements.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 705. Some of the witnesses even twisted the words of Jesus and accused Him of saying “I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands” (Mark 14:58, NKJV).

Seeing that the trial was getting nowhere, the high priest came to the central issue: “Are You the Christ?” (vs. 61). The hitherto silent Jesus could no longer remain so. The hour demanded, and His mission expected, that He confront the high priest with the truth: “I am” (vs. 62, NKJV). By saying this, Jesus was not only answering the chief priest’s question regarding His Messianic status but also was asserting He was the One who revealed Himself to Moses by the name I Am. The testimony immediately brought forth the conviction of blasphemy, and “they all condemned Him to be deserving of death” (vs. 64, NKJV). Where there is no room for truth, truth becomes the first victim.

II. Jesus Before Pilate.

A religious court’s order was not enough to convict a person to death. Roman law required that only a political authority could pass a death sentence. So, the priests rushed Jesus to Pilate to have him seal their verdict and command His death.

Mark skips the details other Gospel writers give: the identification of Caiaphas and Annas, the trial before Herod, Pilate’s introduction “Behold the Man!” (John 19:5, NKJV), the dream of Pilate’s wife, and Pilot’s moral failure to act. Instead, Mark comes to the core of the story. “The chief priests accused Him of many things” (Mark 15:3). Luke 23:1, 2 identifies these “many things”: tax evasion, terrorism, and treason. But Pilate found Jesus faultless. Yet, wanting to please the mob, Pilate laid before them a choice: “Whom should I release, Jesus or Barabbas?” (see Mark 15:6-12). That chilling option is today’s choice, as well. Jesus or Barabbas? The Prince of Peace, whose kingdom is love and grace, or the political rebel who paved his way with violence, plunder, and murder? The kingdom of God or the kingdom of evil? The mob made its choice, and Pilate agreed.
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?
Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** Isaiah 53, Mark 14:53-65, 15:1-41

1. “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ,” wrote Ellen White. “We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 83. What impresses you most about the closing scenes of Jesus’ life? What do you find the most shocking? What do you find particularly heartbreaking?

2. It’s no secret that we resist change; yet, in this week’s study we see the Jewish religious leaders go to ridiculous extremes to maintain the status quo. Shouldn’t they have welcomed new revelations from God? What did they stand to lose? In what ways does our resistance to change put us at risk of being spiritually blind? What means might God use to break us out of the rut of complacency?

3. To most Christians, Pilate is a character reviled and scorned for his unwillingness to stand up to the pressure of those who wanted to do away with Jesus. Imagine a setting in which you would find it difficult, if not impossible, to resist the power of public opinion. What spiritual reserves would you fall back on?

4. Christ’s humiliation and death show the incredible extent to which God will go to save His erring creatures. It also offers a preview of the fate of those who persist in rebelling against God and His will. What tangible expressions of gratitude from us would Jesus consider most gratifying? What Bible text would you use to sum up your loyalty to Him?
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 cross both defied death and defeated Satan. Through Him, eternal life becomes possible.

**Who killed Jesus on the cross?** The Romans? The Jews? The Jewish leaders? A senseless mob? Pilate? The question touches a sensitive nerve of history, because people bearing the name of Christ have inflicted suffering and death upon millions who they thought were responsible. But we have only to look in the mirror to discover the answer. Who killed Jesus? You did. I did. With our sins. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” *(Rom. 5:8, NKJV).* Our “sins . . . weighed heavily upon Christ, and the sense of God’s wrath against sin was crushing out His life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages,* p. 687.

### Witnessing

The ultimate sacrifice one can give to another—laying down one’s life—Christ gave on the cross to all of humankind. He tells us to follow His example: “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” *(John 15:12, 13).*

Every day, men, women, and children receive the gift of life from someone who cared enough to make provisions for helping others should they lose their own life. Transplants make sight possible for a child who never has seen his puppy; a young woman receives a heart transplant and is able to continue being a mother to her young children; a new kidney makes it possible for a grandfather to travel to see his new grandchild; and the stories go on and on. One story, however, catches the spirit of Christ’s admonition in a way few others do.

A family of four was traveling through Italy on vacation. One evening, for no apparent reason, someone in a passing car began shooting at the car carrying the family. The young son was shot and killed. Though devastated and grieving, the parents reached out to others in an astonishing way. They donated their son’s organs to numerous needy recipients of the country in which their beloved son lost his life. What an example of extraordinary love and compassion! Rather than lashing out at the senseless act of violence, these parents brought untold blessings to the families who received the gift of sight and of life itself. This is Christianity in action; this is love begetting love; this is humanity reaching out to humanity, using, as an example, God the Father sharing His Beloved Son with the sinners of earth.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” *(John 3:16).*
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, commending 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?
Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “Dwight L. Moody told of the young man who did not want to serve in Napoleon Bonaparte’s army. When he was drafted, a friend volunteered to go in his place. The substitution was made, and some time later the surrogate was killed in battle. The same young man was, through a clerical error, drafted again. ‘You can’t take me’ he told the startled officers. ‘I’m dead. I died on the battlefield.’ . . . Sure enough, there on the roll was the man’s name, with another name written beside it. The case finally went to the emperor himself. After examining the evidence, Napoleon said, ‘Through a surrogate, this man has not only fought, but has died in his country’s service. No man can die more than once, therefore the law has no claim on him.’”—Bible Illustrator (Parson’s Technology, 1997).

Thought Questions:
1. As payment for our sins, Jesus died on the cross. But was the cross really an integral part of the plan of salvation? Or would the death of Christ by any means have been sufficient? How about natural death or suicide? Explain.

2. The religious-political leaders held the fate of Jesus in their hands. Church leaders have certain powers to squelch or promote people and ideas. What are the roles of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, church policies, and organizational infrastructure in making the right decisions?

Application Questions:
1. Even after living side by side with Jesus, the disciples had doubts about His identity. Put yourself in the disciples’ place. How would you have responded to Jesus’ death? Would you have continued to believe He was the Messiah? What more would you have needed to witness to be 100 percent sure of who Jesus was? What do you need in your life today to be absolutely content in your relationship with Jesus?

2. Jesus was offered wine mixed with a substance to lessen His suffering. But He refused it. He wanted to be fully aware of what was happening and in total control of His senses. He wanted to be absolutely ready for the final round with Satan. In what areas of your life can this example of Jesus be your model to follow?

“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.
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 Jehan 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?


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.
**Key Text:** *Mark 15:42-47*

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To emphasize the importance of Jesus’ death.
2. To strengthen faith in the historical reality of Jesus’ resurrection.
3. To stress the importance of the Resurrection and Christ’s ministry in heaven.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Burial (Isa. 53:9, Mark 15:45).**
   A. Jesus’ burial was prophesied in the Old Testament.
   B. That Jesus was buried proves the reality of His death.
   C. His death was necessary to complete the atonement.

II. **The Empty Tomb (Mark 16:1-8).**
   A. Women were the first to learn of the Resurrection, a fact the early Christians may not have been eager to admit because of society’s low regard for women.
   B. The fact that women discovered the empty tomb confirms the truth of the accounts.
   C. It is important to note that Jesus ignored social prejudices in His resurrection as He did in His life.

III. **He Is Risen (Mark 16:9-18).**
   A. Mark and the other Gospels provide multiple instances of eyewitness testimony to the risen Christ.
   B. The different Gospel accounts of the risen Christ support and complement one another.
   C. The Resurrection assures us of Jesus’ continuing care and concern for His people.

**Summary:** In order for Jesus to rise from the dead, He had to actually die. And so He did. He experienced everything death involves, including burial rites and embalming. All this is well verified. Also well verified is His resurrection. Because of the empty tomb, we know Jesus is alive and ministering on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary until His return.

**Commentary**

Mark’s final two chapters are full of powerful phrases, indicating a definitive progression: They “delivered Him to Pilate” (*Mark 15:1, NKJV*); “they crucified Him” (*vs. 24, NKJV*); Jesus “breathed His last” (*vs. 37, NKJV*); “the veil . . . was torn . . . from top to bottom” (*vs. 38, NKJV*); “he laid Him in a tomb” (*vs. 46, NKJV*); “‘He is risen’” (*Mark 16:6, NKJV*); and “‘Go’” (*vs. 7*). These expressions convey the following: (1) Jesus is real. Born while Caesar Augustus
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?
reigned in Rome (Luke 2:1), He suffered and died under Pontius Pilate. (2) He died condemned for our sins, and His body was laid in a tomb. (3) The rending of the temple veil signaled the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system, at which point Jesus’ death became the ultimate sacrifice for sin, opening “a new and living way” to God (Heb. 10:20, NKJV). (4) He rose from the dead, victor over the grave. (5) The risen Jesus left a commission for His followers.

This week we deal with the reality of Christ’s death, resurrection, and the urgency of His commission.

**I. The Reality of Christ’s Death.**

Skeptics have theorized that Jesus really did not die. Such critics have maintained He merely fainted and became unconscious. Then, later in the tomb, He regained consciousness. Because of such skepticism and because the death of Jesus remains central to the Christian faith, it is necessary to affirm that Jesus died. Hence, the Gospels’ account of the burial is important.

The burial was made possible by Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, a man of means, and a disciple at heart (Mark 15:43). The Sanhedrin’s abandonment of judicial law in preference to lynching the innocent Jesus, combined with the events surrounding the Cross itself, must have weighed heavily on Joseph. Waiting was no longer sufficient; he must step forward in courage. Thus, he buried his newfound Lord in his own new tomb. A true disciple always will find ways to confess her or his faith, ways to say, Christ Jesus died for me.

**II. The Reality of the Resurrection.**

“‘He is risen’” (Mark 16:6, NKJV). These are the three most powerful words ever uttered. Coming from heaven’s special envoy, they proclaimed an empty tomb, a risen Lord, and God’s victory in the cosmic conflict. Without the Resurrection, there is no gospel. And the gospel is that “Christ died for our sins . . . He was buried, and that He rose again the third day” (1 Cor. 15:3, 4, NKJV). Paul further argues that Christianity stands or falls with the truth of Christ’s resurrection: “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. . . . You are still in your sins” (vss. 14-17, NKJV).

Mark, as did the other Gospel writers, points out that several women were at the Crucifixion, burial, and Resurrection, including Mary Magdalene—the least reputable of them all. Indeed, women were the last to leave the cross, the first to see the risen Lord, and the first to be commissioned to go and tell the good news (Mark 16:7). At a time when women were held in least esteem and treated as outcasts, Heaven bestowed upon them the honor of sharing the Great Commission.
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).
5. To the disciples in the upper room (Mark 16:14, John 20:19-24. But Thomas was not present.
6. 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 women came to the tomb early Sunday morning, loaded with spices and perfume and wondering who would roll away the stone for them (Mark 16:3). Were they aware Jesus once said faith can move mountains (Mark 11:23)? The women did not lack faith. They went straight to their destination and found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. “‘It was not possible that He should be held by’” death (Acts 2:24, NKJV).

The empty tomb stands forever as the guarantee of our salvation. “The enemies of Jesus placed a guard before the tomb to see that none of His friends took Him from it. The friends of Jesus must ever stand before the empty tomb, armed with an informed and intelli-

**Inductive Bible Study**


1. What significance do you see in the fact that Jesus was buried before sundown on the preparation day (Friday) and that He rested in the tomb over the hours of the Sabbath? What does this coincidence reveal about the role of the Sabbath?

2. There’s always significance in what Jesus does. What is the significance of women being the first to tell others about the empty tomb? Are there lessons for us today that go beyond, say, gender roles in the church? If so, what are they?

3. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples several times, in various settings. He almost always appeared suddenly, without warning, and then vanished mysteriously. It’s almost as if He were saying, “You never know where you’ll see Me next.” And implied is the notion, “I’ll never be far away.” When are you most conscious of Jesus’ presence through the ministry of the Holy Spirit? How does it feel for you to experience His presence?

4. Mark wrote: “The Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it” (Mark 16:20, NIV). What kind of “signs” would the people in your community find particularly persuasive?

5. There have been countless attempts to contradict the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. But nothing gives it more credibility than the courage with which Christ’s disciples through the ages risked their lives to take to the world the message, “He is risen!” What are you doing to spread the word? How can our congregations be more effective in proclaiming “He is risen, indeed”?
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?**

**III. The Commission of the Risen Lord.**

Mark begins with a reference to the gospel of Christ and ends with Christ’s commission to His disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. This was no ordinary commission. It dealt with the very heart of God—a heart full of love and grace manifested by

**Witnessing**

Many people have taken up the study of genealogy—delving deeply into their individual family histories, going back scores of years in order to trace the origins of their ancestors. As part of the process they visit cemeteries, looking for graves holding the remains of a family member who died long ago. It can be a long, tedious process, but it brings a sense of connection to many searching for that linkage to the past.

What an opportunity we have as Seventh-day Adventists to assist those around us with a unique genealogy search—the search for eternal life through Jesus Christ. With an empty tomb the outcome, how can we hold back on sharing with others the salvation story? If we’re not doing it already or are prepared to begin doing it immediately, what does that tell us about our “ties” with our Father and our full acceptance and belief in the story of redemption? When we’re really walking with Jesus, we can’t hold back on sharing His life story!

Jesus’ final resting place on earth is empty. Because it’s empty, we are able to live forever in heaven with Christ Jesus and God the Father.

I serve a risen Saviour, He’s in the world today;
I know that He is living, whatever men may say;
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer,
And just the time I need Him He’s always near.
He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way.
He Lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.


He lives, so now we may live. Believe this with all your heart. When you do, others will know through your daily example what it means to “serve a risen Savior.”
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?
His Son, who took our sins so we might be reconciled to God. Christ’s resurrection provided the launching pad for the proclamation of this gospel.

The commission is for every disciple to witness to the gospel of the risen Lord and to make disciples from all nations (see Matt. 28:19, 20). Creating a global community without barriers, confessing one Lord and one faith, and anticipating one hope are the tasks before us today. The promise is that we are never alone in the fulfillment of this commission. The Lord, ascended to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, will work with us (Mark 16:19, 20). He who commands is also the One who enables.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A Jewish soldier began attending Christian services and was impressed with the character and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. A bit confused, he went to his rabbi and said, “Rabbi, the Christians say that the Christ has already come and that He is Jesus. But you claim He is yet to come.” “Yes,” acknowledged the rabbi. “Well,” asked the young soldier, “when our Christ comes, what more than Jesus Christ can we expect?”

Thought Questions:

1. During His reign, Emperor Diocletian set up a stone pillar as a commemoration of total extermination of Christians from the world. What if Diocletian could see his monument today! Absolutely nothing can put an end to God’s great plan. Identify the elements today that act as barriers to Christianity. What does God expect of us? To sit back and let things take their course, knowing that nothing will get in the way of God’s plan? Or take responsibility as God’s representatives? Explain.

2. Consider the functions of Jesus in the sinner’s life. Why is it important for us to accept Him completely and without reservation before we can maximize our potential?

Application Questions:

Nothing can top Jesus’ death on Calvary. It is Jesus’ sinless life, death, and resurrection that make the virgin birth and Jesus’ identity as Son of God believable. In other words, His life was a testimony to who He was. In what ways can you do the same? Give specific examples. How can our lives stand as a testimony to who we are in Christ?

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.