Mission of Hope

2009 Week of Prayer Readings
Message From the President

Dear Fellow Believers:

Every year the Week of Prayer provides the occasion for the world church to come together to praise God, to listen to His Word, and to pray. Let us not forget this last element: prayer. As I write to you, there is great anxiety in the world. People seem to be disoriented. Pray for the human family that it may find true hope and peace in Jesus, and pray for the church that it may become, through the power of the Spirit, a more efficient instrument of God in sharing the Christian hope. God has not abandoned us. He still holds in His powerful hands not only your personal future but also the future of His remnant church.

We have the privilege of being involved with our Lord in a mission of hope. This mission is not the result of human creativity but the work of God, who out of love Himself embarked on a mission of hope and salvation for the fallen human race. Love is the fuel of mission. Any other motivation for mission diminishes the value of the mission itself and impoverishes our spiritual lives. Mission was conceived within God in the womb of His eternal love. We see that mission in human form in the person of God’s Son. He is our model for mission. His mission is our mission.

Our church is a movement of hope with a mission of hope to the human race. Its mission is graphically depicted in Revelation 14:6-12—the three angels’ messages. The messages of the three angels are to go everywhere in order to bring hope to a world in search of ultimate hope. Human hopes are false images of the divine hope and consequently are not reliable. It is our mission to move across the surface of the planet, planting the seed of true hope in the human hearts. Each one of us is represented by those angels flying in midair. Christ has made room for us to participate with Him in the consummation of His mission to the world. Our lives find fulfillment and meaning in being part of this wonderful divine mission. Therefore be part of it, get involved in it, and let that mission of hope enrich your life.

The readings for this week are not doctrinal expositions; they are sermons that seek to describe our mission, strengthen our faith, and motivate us to be part of that mission. Once again, pray for the world church as it fulfills the mission of hope entrusted to it by our glorified Lord. Church members like you are involved in this mission around the world, at times under difficult circumstances. Pray for them that their faith may be strengthened and their work be fruitful to the glory of the Lord.

May the grace of our Lord be always with you.

Yours in our loving Lord,

Jan Paulsen

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JAN PAULSEN IS PRESIDENT OF THE WORLDWIDE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH.
The church is a complex entity organized by the Spirit of the Lord for mission. A vibrant church is not one immersed in doctrinal and theological discussions that result in tensions and divisiveness. The church that is fully alive is the church committed to and involved in the mission of the Lord. In fact, it could be stated boldly that the church actualizes itself in the performance of its mission. Its mis-

CHRIST’S MISSION IS OUR MISSION.
sion defines it. Mission is a divine program initiated by God and revealed to us in His Son, whom He sent to this world. We will look into the mission of the Son of God and its implications for our mission as a church.

God Sent the Son
The sending of the Son was a cosmic event based on a divine decision made by God before the creation of the world. Mission was in place before there was an actual need for it. Then, at the proper moment within human history, the Father sent the Son, “born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). Jesus was fully aware that His presence in this world was not a historical accident, but a purposive action. He knew why He was on this planet; there was a very particular reason for His life. This sense of mission gave meaning to His life.

The sending of the Son implied an element of separation. It is not that the Father was no longer with Him. No, no! Jesus testified, “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone” (John 8:29). In the fulfillment of the mission, Father and Son worked together, but their togetherness expressed itself in a different way. It was necessary for Jesus to become human, setting aside the glory of His divinity. But this type of separation, necessary for the mission, pointed to the cross. The sending of the Son was a cosmic event based on a divine decision made by God before the creation of the world.

The mission of the Son consisted in giving His life for others, hence His mission was not to deliver a message that was unrelated to Him. He was in His own person the message God sent to us: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9). The Messenger incarnated the message and delivered it through His death. He came to save us, to give us eternal life (John 3:16). He was sent by the Father “into the world that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9). He proclaimed salvation by giving it out of His own life. His mission and His person were inseparable. In that self-sacrificial act, He revealed the loving character of the Father.

Christ was sent to reveal the glory of God to a humanity immersed in the darkness of sin and ignorance. He said to the Father, “I have revealed you” (John 17:6). He knew what His mission was and He was able to tell the Father, “I have done what I was sent to do!” The apostle John says, “The Word became flesh… We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). He testifies to the fact that Jesus accomplished His mission. The mission of Jesus was a display of the true character of God in the context of a ferocious cosmic battle. But the revelation of God that He brought to us was the revelation of His own person. Only God can reveal the fullness of His character. John testifies: “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (1:18). In the person of the Son, God became the missionary par excellence. “He [Jesus] was the greatest missionary the world ever saw” (Medical Ministry, p. 15).

Jesus revealed the Father in His person, but He also embodied that revelation in human words. There is a body of teachings that Jesus shared with humans, the teachings of Jesus. His teaching was not His own, but it came “from him who sent me” (John 7:16). His commitment to His mission was so determinative that He said, “I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it… So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say” (12:49, 50). The message He proclaimed was given to Him by the Father, and He was not free to change it or modify it as He pleased. This is important. Jesus as a messenger was commissioned by the Father to represent Him and to speak for Him. This indicates that a messenger is not only willing to fulfill the mission entrusted to them, but at the same time they are obedient to the one who sent them. It was clear to Jesus that He came “to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (4:34). In the realization of the mission, Jesus did not seek to please Himself but Him who sent Him (5:30). And He did exactly that.

Shortly before going up to the cross Jesus said to the Father, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4). And He then added, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (verse 18). The mission is not finished; it continues through those whom Jesus now is sending into the world. His mission is the model for their mission. We have been told that “the true missionary spirit is the spirit of Christ. The world’s Redeemer was the great model missionary” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 385). Let us reflect on how to apply that to our lives.

I Have Sent Them
Our existence finds a particular dimension of meaning in the fulfillment of the mission Jesus entrusted to us.
When He says to you, “I have sent you,” He is redefining your existence or at least the very reason for it. In a world of existential disorientation, humans experience a deep sense of emptiness as they search for a reason for their presence in it. Then we hear the Lord saying to us, “I have sent you!” There is a reason for our presence on this planet. You should never think that your presence here is accidental. We were born into this world for mission, and everything we do should be oriented by this sense of mission. By calling us to mission Jesus enriches our lives in glorious and wonderful ways, providing a sense of purpose.

The mission entrusted to us is Jesus’ redemptive work and its significance for us and for the human race. The message to be proclaimed is the one embodied in the person and the words of Jesus, preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures. We have no right to alter that message, because it is not ours to do with it as we please. The message and the mission originated in God and were given to us through Jesus. We must fulfill our mission in humble submission to the message as we proclaim it. We deliver to the world His message, not ours. Obviously, we should develop ways of proclaiming it that are attractive to the society in which we live, but it is not our duty to alter the message itself.

In order for the mission to be effective, His message should become our message. By that I mean that it has to be a transforming power in our lives. Just before sending us on our mission, Jesus said to the Father, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). The message of Jesus is to be appropriated by us as individuals and as a community of believers. We are called to reveal the glory and power of God in our lives as we constantly move forward in the fulfillment of that mission of hope. It has been God’s intention “that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:10, 11). The mystery of the saving power of the cross continues to be unfolded in the experience of the church; thus it witnesses to the cosmos the goodness, power, and love of God. Every life possessed by the saving power of the cross becomes a cosmic witness to the manifold wisdom of God and His transforming power.

By calling us to participate in His mission, Jesus was announcing His departure. After His return to the Father the time gap was to be filled with a mission of hope to the human race. He was not abandoning the church. No, no! He promised His disciples, as representatives of His church, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). But His presence among us finds expression through the Spirit. He did not send only us; He sent the Spirit to enable us to fulfill the mission of hope (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). The fulfillment of the mission means that the separation will come to an end. At that moment we will be able to say, “We have brought You glory by completing the work You have given us to do” (cf. John 17:4).

We are not yet there. The last mile is still ahead of us, but we continue to fly over the earth, proclaiming with a loud voice the eternal gospel of salvation to every human being, calling all to fear God and to worship the Creator. This is indeed a mission of hope, and we must continue to press together to fulfill it through the power of the Spirit. It is in the unity of the fellowship of the Spirit that the mission will be accomplished. It is this unity of love with our Savior and with other believers that facilitates the mission of hope to the world. At the close of human history, Jesus has called and sent all of us to go and work in the vineyard. Listen once more to His prayer on our behalf: “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified” (John 17:18, 19).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING

1. How can modern men and women gain a sense of purpose for their lives?
2. Is every Christian called to be a missionary? Explain your answer.
3. In what ways is our mission one of hope?

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HOW REVELATION 14:6 DEFINES OUR MISSION
Universal Mission of Hope

BY KARL HAFFNER

It has been suggested that there is only one unique doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. What doctrine do you suppose that is? The Sabbath? The state of the dead? Perhaps it is the Spirit of Prophecy. What do you think?

Here is the answer: "[There is] one unique doctrine of [the Seventh-day Adventist] church. There are other people who believe the Sabbath truth and have held on to that truth for years. There are others who believe the same way we do on the condition of man in death. There are others who accept the gift of prophecy, and there are many, many people, of almost every denomination, who believe in the second coming of Christ. Our only unique contribution to the religious world has been the three angels’ messages and the connection they made for us with the sanctuary and judgment teaching."¹

That’s it: the three angels’ messages found in Revelation 14:6-13. Our church has been called to trumpet this truth in the last days of earth’s history. The passage resonates with hope. It defines our church’s mission. And it sings of salvation!

Revelation 14:6

In Revelation 14:6, John writes: “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.”

Let’s get a little historical context and then we will draw some applications. Keep in mind that the author of Revelation is John, the beloved disciple of Jesus. He is in exile on the island of Patmos around A.D. 95 and is sharing this message of hope and judgment with Christians scattered throughout the seven churches in Asia. These followers of Jesus were experiencing persecution at the hand of the emperor Domitian. Listen to how historians describe this man: “By all accounts Domitian appears to have been a thoroughly nasty person, rarely polite, insolent, arrogant, and cruel. He was a tall man, with large eyes, though weak sight. And showing all the signs of someone drunk with power, he preferred to be addressed as ‘dominus et deus’ (‘master and god’).”²

In this context of persecution God sends a message of hope to His servant John. God pulls back the curtain of time and allows John to see the final chapters of the human story on this earth. God reveals how He will call upon His people in the last days before He returns with His universal message of hope.

The Nature of Our Calling

Now for the remainder of this study, let’s explore the nature of this calling. Of the many nuances we could emphasize in Revelation 14:6, consider three key words that capture our calling as a church: (1) hope, (2) mission, and (3) worldwide. In sum, we share a worldwide mission of hope.

1. We share a message of hope.

First, ours is a message of hope. It is the “eternal gospel.” We are heralds of hope. Jerome Groopman, M.D., author of The Anatomy of Hope, defines hope as “the ability to see a path to the future.” He explains: “I think hope has been, is, and always will be the heart of medicine and healing. . . . [Even with all our medical technology] we still come back to this profound human need to believe that there is a possibility to reach a future that is better than the one in the present.”³

Think about that: for all of the advances in medical technology, one of the brightest minds in the world says that the best medicine we know of is hope.

The Bible teaches that there is indeed a path to a brighter
future. In the three angels’ messages we find this pathway.

2. We share a mission that matters.

Our second observation from Revelation 14:6 is that we share a mission that matters. There are a lot of things that churches get involved in that really don’t matter very much. Whether it’s squabbling about what color to paint the walls or bickering about worship style, it’s easy to get distracted with missions that don’t matter.

While it’s not that these issues are unimportant, it is just that they do not matter nearly as much as our primary mission—to proclaim the message of the three angels to the world. After all, eternity hangs in the balance!

Some years ago, the Oregonian carried the story of the 20-year reunion of the crash victims of United Airlines Flight 173 in Portland, Oregon. The headline read: “Flight 173 survivors call pilot their savior.” At that reunion some 200 people—mainly passengers on a DC-8 that crashed into a Portland neighborhood—applauded the man who steered the plane to the ground. United Flight 173 ran out of fuel at 6:15 p.m., December 28, 1978, as its crew tried to overcome a problem with the landing gear. When the plane crashed, 10 of 189 aboard died.

Throughout the article are quotes of survivors heralding Captain McBroom as their savior. In spite of all the accolades, however, McBroom could not rejoice. Instead, he spoke repeatedly of how he had been haunted for 20 years about the 10 who did not survive. McBroom had this comment about the applause: “It’s kind of bittersweet. I appreciate it,” he said, “but we lost 10, and that is heavy.”

The pilot whom many called their savior could only cry for the 10.

One time our Savior broke down crying because He could see with eternal lenses how many of His children were facing death for eternity. So He wept over the city. Then He called His church for the final hour to proclaim the everlasting good news of salvation for all who believe. That is our Father’s heart. That is our mission of hope. It matters.

3. We share a warning that is worldwide.

Finally, we share a warning that is worldwide. God intends for this message to be proclaimed “to all who [are] still on earth,” as Eugene Peterson puts it in his paraphrase, The Message. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we are challenged to radiate the light of Jesus in dark neighborhoods. Together, we share a message of hope. We share a mission that matters. And we share a warning that is worldwide.

A parable is told of a woodsman working in the forest one day when he was attacked by a tiger. The woodsman seized the tiger by the tail, and the tiger began turning around in circles, trying to get its teeth into the woodsman. A Buddhist monk, out for a walk, was attracted by the noise and sauntered over. The woodsman, upon seeing the monk, cried out, “Please take my ax there and kill this tiger before I am eaten alive!”

The monk, lowering his eyes and piously folding his hands, replied, “I am sorry but I cannot kill the tiger. You see, I am a Buddhist and as a Buddhist all life is sacred to me, be it insect, human, or animal.”

The woodsman answered, “Fortunately, I am not blessed with your belief, so would you please take my place at the tail of the tiger and let me kill the beast.”

The monk agreed and they exchanged places. The woodsman then walked over, picked up his ax, placed it on his shoulder, and nonchalantly strolled off into the forest. The Buddhist monk, very much alarmed, cried out, “Please, come back and kill this tiger as you promised or else I will be devoured!”

The woodsman’s parting reply was: “I was so impressed by your example that I have become a convert to your belief.”

People are converted to Christianity in the same way—by watching our example. That’s why Jesus told His followers: “You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. . . . Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16, Message).

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we are challenged to share a message of hope. We share a mission that matters. And we share a warning that is worldwide.

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**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING**

1. Explain how Revelation 14:6 emphasizes **hope**, **mission**, and **worldwide**.

2. What part does personal example play in the fulfillment of our mission?
Following Saddam Hussein’s capture, the former dictator was flown to a secret location for a meeting with four new leaders of Iraq. It was reported that despite his condition, Saddam was defiant and unrepentant. Ahmad Chalabi, a Governing Council member and the head of the Iraqi National Congress, said: “He was quite lucid. He had command of his faculties. He would not apologize to the Iraqi people. He did not deny any of the crimes he was confronted with having done. He tried to justify them.”

Mowaffak al-Rubaie, another Governing Council member in the room, said: “I was in his torture chamber in 1979, and now he was sitting there, powerless in front of me without anybody stopping me from doing anything to him, just imagine. We were arguing, and he was using very foul language.”

The four men spent about 30 minutes confronting Saddam with his crimes. As they left, Al-Rubaie barked at the former dictator: “May God curse you. Tell me, when are you going to be accountable to God and the day of judgment? What are you going to tell Him about Halabja and the mass graves, the Iran-Iraq war, thousands and thousands executed? What are you going to tell God?”

Saddam responded by using more foul language.1

The Judgment Has Come

Although Saddam Hussein may never have acknowledged it, the day of judgment is real. Someday every person will be accountable to God. This warning of judgment is an integral part of the message God will proclaim through His church in the last days. The first of the three angels in Revelation 14 declares, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come” (verse 7).

What judgment are we talking about? If “the hour of his judgment has come,” then doesn’t it stand to reason that it must be happening right now—in the last days of earth’s history?

To answer these questions, it is important to understand that any judgment involves different phases. This first phase of judgment does indeed occur before Jesus comes again. This is obvious in the context because the second and third angels refer to the time before Christ’s coming, so the first angel’s message must refer to the pre-Advent period as well.

Any fair judgment involves an investigative phase. This is when the facts are considered before a verdict is given. Can you imagine a judge that just doled out punishments, willy-nilly, without first going through an investigation to determine guilt or innocence? If God were to judge in this manner, what confidence would we have in His fairness?

At the Second Coming God will proclaim, “My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done” (Rev. 22:12). In other words, when Jesus comes again the investigation part of the judgment will be over. Clearly the decision of who is lost or saved has already been made. So we must proclaim that the hour of the pre-Advent judgment has come.

OK, we know this investigative phase happens prior to
the Second Coming, but when does it begin? Daniel 8:14 prophesies the event: “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” (KJV). This is imagery taken from the Old Testament tabernacle on the Day of Atonement.

Here is how it worked: Suppose that I am an Israelite in the ancient world and I steal a toga at David’s market. Naturally, I feel guilty, so I confess my sin at the tabernacle. I receive forgiveness and my sin is transferred to a lamb; but that sin remains in the tabernacle.

The tabernacle would then be cleansed of my sin on the Day of Atonement when the priest entered the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. On this day the sanctuary was “cleansed,” and all sin was eradicated from the camp of Israel.

On the cross Jesus became our sacrificial lamb. So whenever we ask forgiveness for sin, we are clean because of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Our sins reside in the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus intercedes on our behalf as the High Priest. But when is the heavenly sanctuary cleansed? Just as in the Old Testament, it is cleansed on the Day of Atonement.

When did this Day of Atonement take place? Daniel tells us it was to happen 2,300 prophetic days (meaning 2,300 literal years in prophetic literature) after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. This decree happened in 457 B.C. Thus, 2,300 years after that decree, in 1844, Jesus began His final, investigative phase of judgment to eventually eradicate sin forever.

Because of Jesus Christ, who ministers in our behalf in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, the investigative phase of the judgment turns up nothing for every sinner who has accepted Jesus as their Savior. The sanctuary is cleansed! Jesus will come again to redeem His own! And that, my friend, is good news!

The Judgment as Good News

So long as we accept Jesus as our Savior and High Priest, we need not fear the fury of God’s judgment. Just foster a friendship with Jesus.

Steve Winger offers a picture of this during his last college test—a final in a logic class known for its difficult exams. Anticipating that awful day of judgment made students’ toenails sweat. In the class, the professor said they could bring as much information to the exam as they could fit on one piece of 8½” by 11” note paper. Most students crammed as many facts as possible on the sheet.

There was one student, however, who sauntered into class, put a piece of notebook paper on the floor, and had an advanced logic student stand on the paper. The advanced logic student told him everything he needed to know. He was the only student to receive an A.

So it is in the final test. We have nothing to fear, so long as we’re with Jesus. Therefore, for every believer who knows Jesus and accepts what He did for us on the cross, the day of judgment is really the day of deliverance!

The Judgment Will Bring Deliverance

The prophet Peter speaks of this day by describing three times when God acted decisively in judgment. Listen to the sobering account: “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men . . . if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment” (2 Peter 2:4-9).

“Make no mistake,” Peter tells us, “the consequence of sin is death.” Even though God will act in judgment, He remains true to His character of love and redeems His faithful.

Former U.S. president George Herbert Walker Bush took a trip back to the South Pacific. During World War II, Bush had been a bomber pilot and was shot down by Japanese antiaircraft fire. An article described Bush’s return to the very place where he was rescued from his downed aircraft.

During his return visit, Bush met with a Japanese man who said he witnessed Bush’s rescue back in 1944. The veteran shared that as he and his comrades were watching the rescue take place, one of his friends remarked, “Surely America will win the war if they care so much for the life of one pilot.”

As Christians we can have the same confidence that we will ultimately win the battle between good and evil because God cares so much about every one of His children.

This is our shared message. It is urgent that we proclaim this good news far and near. The day of deliverance is coming. Our salvation is sure, for our hope is in Jesus.


QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING

1. Which is true—day of judgment or day of deliverance?

2. What is the purpose of the Day of Atonement in the heavenly sanctuary?
Study the story of any successful business and inevitably you will find a compelling mission that fuels the organization to greatness. This mission captures the core of what the company is all about. For example, consider the mission of Coca Cola: “To put a can of Coke within arm’s reach of everybody in the world.”

Walt Disney aspires “to make people happy.”

Sony says: “We want to experience the joy of advancing and applying technology for the benefit of the public.”

Software giant Microsoft is all about empowering people “through great software—any time, any place, and on any device.”

And finally, consider this grand, audacious mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: “To proclaim the message of the three angels in Revelation 14.” Gutsy mission, isn’t it?

To this end we are devoting our week to a deeper study into this passage in Revelation 14 that outlines the mission of God’s end-time church. We share a prophetic directive to proclaim a message of hope to the world.

Worship and Our Mission

Revelation 14:7 records: “He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.’”

Yesterday we looked at this verse and considered the urgency of our message in light of the judgment that “has come.” Today we revisit the same verse to consider the importance of worship to our mission of hope. Notice at the heart of our message of hope is a calling to “worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

Philip Yancey observes: “It is a terrible thing to be grateful and have no one to thank, to be awed and have no one to worship.” As a community of faith, we have our God to thank. We have Someone to worship! This is in the DNA of our church. Worship is at the core of our mission.

So what does this mean? Let’s address three questions with regard to worship: whom? how? and when?

Whom to Worship

Notice who receives our worship. We worship Him who created the heavens and the earth. In our sophisticated age of space travel and savvy technology, it is an unending temptation to shift our affections from our Creator to ourselves.

In the late nineteenth century, two pioneers were obsessed with climbing Mount Rainier, that glorious 14,410-foot peak in Washington state. They sought help from a local Native American guide, who informed them that his people considered it sacrilegious to climb Mount Rainier. He described God’s home in the lake of fire at the crown and that no Native American dared to trample on the holy ground.

The climbers offered more and more cash, until eventually one guide sold out. Although the guide tried to mislead them, the men were determined. Near the pinnacle, the guide said, “I am forbidden to go any higher. From here on, you must go on alone.” Courageously the men persevered, determined to conquer the mountain. They did. They snapped pictures. They
planted a flag. Chalk up another victory for humanity.

While their gritty resolve is admirable, at a more profound level their accomplishment is disturbing. After all, they violated a sacred trust. They conquered for humanity what had previously been reserved for God.

In today’s sophisticated age it remains a constant temptation to elevate humans and diminish God. When Samuel F. B. Morse invented the telegraph more than 150 years ago, his first words sent by wire were “What hath God wrought.” When Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon in 1969, he said, “That’s one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind.” It used to be God who got credit for human innovation. That’s not the case anymore.

Rabbi Harold Kushner observes: “Technology is the enemy of reverence. Deliberately or inadvertently, technology puts out sacred fires because it is the celebration of what man can do. In the Bible, idol worship is not a matter of praying to stones and statues. idol worship is the celebration of the man-made as the highest achievement in the world. What is wrong with idol worship, with worshipping human achievements as if they were the ultimate accomplishment, is not just that it is disloyal or offensive to God. The sin of idol worship is that it is futile. Because it is really an indirect way of worshipping ourselves, it can never help us grow, as the worship of a God beyond ourselves can help us grow. As a result, we find life flat and uninspiring, and don’t realize why.”

Every human spirit craves to cry out with the psalmist: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him . . . ?” (Ps. 8:3, 4).

If God is not the object of our affections, then we will find something else to worship. Movie idols, video games, fast cars—puny, pitiful gods will steal our worship if we are not focused upon the one and only God who is truly worthy of our praise, the God who created all of heaven and earth.

How to Worship

This brings us to the second question: How shall we worship? This question has sparked vigorous debates throughout Christendom. Do we worship with drums? dancing? the pipe organ? uplifted hands? silence? laughter?

It is not about us and the style of worship we prefer. Authentic worship is all about surrendering completely to God. “I’m convinced that pastors don’t give two cents about worship,” laments Eugene Peterson. “They really don’t. And there’s a reason for it. True worship doesn’t make anything happen. It is a losing of control, a weaning from manipulative language and entertainment. . . . Pastors sense that if they really practice worship they are going to empty out the sanctuary pretty fast.”

Far too often, people confuse worship with self-gratifying entertainment. Thus, they will say things like “I’m going to worship at First Church today because they have a funny preacher from out of town. Next week I’ll worship at Main Street Fellowship because they have a hot worship band.”

The result? We’re raising a generation of junkies that scurry to the most electric worship one week and then to the most titillating preacher the next week, never anchoring to any local church. They whine about how the worship service fails to meet their needs—as if the church exists to cater to the entertainment whims and emotional cravings of selfish consumers.

Worship means surrendering every compulsion to God’s control and fully submitting ourselves to Him. The result of worship, then, is always a life of radical obedience. When we truly worship God, everything we do becomes an offering of surrender and praise. It is about Him, not us. When we come together to worship we express our gratitude to Him and humbly present to Him our needs. He is the center of corporate worship, not us.

When to Worship

This brings us to the question When do we worship? Read Revelation 14:7 and notice the clear reference to the Creation story. The One who receives our worship is He who “made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

In the story of Creation we find this account: “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Gen. 2:2, 3).

Ellen White adds: “The true Sabbath, given to man as a memorial of creation, has been taken from its rightful place as a sacred command of God, and, instead, a false sabbath has been exalted and worshiped. . . . But a message, the third angel’s message, has come to the world, to exalt the truth to its right position, that it may stand fast as God’s testing truth for these last days. God’s requirements are to be given to the world in all their original freshness and power.”

Isn’t it a privilege to proclaim God’s gift of the Sabbath in all its “original freshness and power”? As Seventh-day Adventists, such is our joy; such is our mission!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING

1. How much of our lives should involve worship? Give reasons for your answers.
2. Why is worship at the center of the crisis in the last days?
3. What “gods” do modern people worship?
Since the retirement of Tony Blair as prime minister of the United Kingdom (1997–2007), much has been said about his spiritual life. A 2008 issue of *Time* magazine offered this insight into Blair’s faith:

“Blair is deeply religious—the most openly devout political leader of Britain since William Ewart Gladstone more than 100 years ago. He handles questions about religion deftly. He doesn’t back down. His longtime press secretary and consigliere, Alastair Campbell, remembers Blair in 1996 at a school in Scotland where a gunman had killed 16 children and a teacher. In a bloodstained classroom, Campbell asked Blair, ‘What does your God make of this?’ Blair, says Campbell, stopped and replied, ‘Just because man is bad, it does not mean that God is not good.’”1

We don’t write off God’s goodness just because humans can be so evil. In spite of the seemingly inevitable moral, financial, and political collapse of the world today, there is a voice of hope that resounds from Seventh-day Adventist churches around the world. This voice reminds a desperate world of God’s goodness and our indomitable reason for hope.

When human systems fail, and they all will fail, look to Jesus and you will find reason for hope. We are reminded of this truth as we continue our study of the three angels’ messages in Revelation 14. Today we come to the second angel, who delivers this warning: “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (verse 8, KJV). The fall of Babylon symbolizes the end-time collapse of false religious
hopes and systems; however, the message of God’s end-time church affirms that someday all things will be set right. God’s kingdom will prevail.

Second Angel’s Message: What It Is

So what is the message of the second angel? It is a message that Babylon is fallen. What is the essence of Babylon? It is a spirit of self-sufficiency that dates back at least to the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9. In this story the people schemed, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:4). Notice they did not wish to exalt God, but rather themselves.

In Revelation 17:5 Babylon is called “THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” Literally and symbolically, Babylon has been the enemy of God’s truth and people. It represents in a particular way all apostate religious organizations in these last days. To trust in Babylon is to put one’s faith and hope in the hands of civil and religious powers rather than in the power of God alone.

Historically, the glorious years of ancient Babylon occurred during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar when he rebuilt the city into one of beauty. He schemed to make his empire universal and eternal. The city boasted of 53 temples dedicated to important gods, 955 small sanctuaries, and 384 street altars. It had hanging gardens (one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World) that were irrigated by a system of pipes through which water was pumped up. Babylon was the site of so much building under Nebuchadnezzar that it takes 126 pages just to record the inscriptions that were carved into the buildings that he had constructed.

From the roof of his palace, Nebuchadnezzar could see a double wall around his city. The outer wall was 56 miles long, and wide enough to turn a four-horse chariot around on. The historian Herodotus, in the fifth century B.C., claimed that Babylon surpassed in splendor any city in the known world.

No wonder Nebuchadnezzar could gloat in his prosperity. From the rooftop of his palace he mused to himself, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Dan. 4:30).

This delusional king is not unlike the patient at a psychiatric institution. Every evening he would shout from his cell, “I am the king of the universe! I am the ruler of the world. Everyone will do as I say, for I am the supreme commander of the universe!”

One evening a doctor dropped in and confronted him. “Harry! Get down off your chair. Stop beating your chest. You’re disrupting people who are trying to sleep.”

“But I am the king of the universe.”

“Yes, I am!” he cried all the louder. “And just what makes you think you are the king of the universe?”

“God told me I was the king of the universe!”

Just then a voice erupted from another cell down the hallway: “I did not!”

Like Nebuchadnezzar, many men have fancied themselves as God. This haughty spirit of Babylon is the same attitude that got Satan ousted from heaven. It’s the spirit that got Adam and Eve booted from the garden. It’s at the heart of the great controversy between good and evil—it is the rebellious spirit that seeks to be God. And let’s be clear: this spirit of Babylon continues to pollute our planet.

Listen to some of the teachings of popular leaders today:

• Casey Treat, founding pastor of the Christian Faith Center in Seattle, Washington, once preached: “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost had a conference and they said, ‘Let us make man an exact duplicate of us.’ Oh, I don’t know about you, but that does turn my crank! An exact duplicate of God! Say it out loud—‘I’m an exact duplicate of God!’”

The congregation repeated it again and again, louder and louder; they chanted back and forth in a furious frenzy, “I’m an exact duplicate of God!”

• Kenneth Copeland, a well-known televangelist, says, “You don’t have a god in you. You are one!”

Can you see how these popular leaders talk like
Christians? . . . look like Christians? . . . act like Christians? And yet they teach the very thing that got Satan kicked out of heaven—that we can become as God.

God alone is worthy of our worship. The teaching of Babylon is that we are gods—worthy of worship and free to redefine God's law. So God calls a people in the last days to acknowledge His lordship. They will publicly dispel the deceit of the evil one and of his religious and political instrument and tell the truth: “Babylon is fallen!”

Prior to Christ's return, the warning of the second angel will be heralded by God's true followers. Their message will challenge people to come out of the phony religious movement of Babylon and follow the one and only true God.

In this light, the message of the second angel has great relevance for Christ's followers today, for it begs the question: Will you be wholly devoted to God or not? Asked another way: Will you worship your Savior or yourself?

**Second Angel's Message: Its Relevance Today**

There is probably a Babylonian element in all of us, which, if not brought into subjection to Christ, could finally overcome us. We should be vigilant.

According to a parable, once there was a man who asked God, “Which do you think is harder, to be man or to be God?”

“Being God is much harder,” God answered. “I must look after the whole universe with its planets and galaxies. All you must worry about is your family and your job.”

“True enough,” the man sparred. “But you have infinite time and infinite power. The hard part is not doing the job, but doing it within the limits of human strength and the human life span.”

“You don’t know what you are talking about” God said. “It’s much harder to be God.”

The man replied, “How can you say that when you have never been human and I have never been God? What do you say we change places for just one second, so you can know the feeling of being man and I can know what it feels like to be God. Just one second, that’s all, and then we’ll change back.”

God didn’t like the idea, but the man kept begging until God relented. They changed places. Man became God and God became human.

As the story goes, once man sat on the divine throne, he refused to give God back His place. Ever since, man has ruled the world and God has been in exile.


Can you see the relevance of the second angel’s message for your life today? Is there an area in which you have dethroned God and perched yourself in His stead? Maybe it’s a financial issue in which you find it necessary to rob God of tithes and offerings in order to meet your obligations. So, will you trust God to be God when it comes to money matters? Maybe it’s a time issue and you want to carve out quality time each day to commune with God, but with the press of papers due and deadlines at work, you can’t find yourself clear to squeeze in devotions.

The real issue is this: Do you trust God to be God when it comes to the way you spend your time? Perhaps it’s an ingrained pattern of sin that feeds feelings of futility in life. By escaping into the shadows of compromise you temporarily find relief from your pain. I’m wondering: Do you trust God to be God when it comes to finding your ultimate value only in Him?

To place yourself on the throne that rightfully belongs to God alone is to live in the spirit of Babylon. As God’s remnant people with a special message in the last days, we are called to challenge the value system of the world and live in an intimate dependence upon God alone, for Babylon is fallen.

Consider the somber appeal of John the revelator: “After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.’ Then I heard another voice from heaven say: ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues’” (Rev. 18:1-4).

Here is Jesus’ final appeal to His followers who are members of “Babylon” churches. “Come out of her,” He pleads, “lest you share in her sins.”

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3 Ibid.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING**

1. As a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is it possible for me to partake of the spirit of Babylon? How?

2. How is the ancient city of Babylon an apt illustration of the powers of fallen religion in the last days?
Google the phrase “mark of the beast” and you’ll get more than 4,620,000 hits. Seems a lot of folk are intrigued with this term, but what exactly is the mark of the beast? It is an attempt to save yourself through submission to powers that are opposed to God and to His law; it is worshipping the creature and not the Creator. It is the opposite of the seal of God. Let’s read Revelation 14:9-12 and develop these ideas.

**True Worship vs. False Worship**

“A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’ This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.”

First, we find the practice of true worship juxtaposed against the counterfeit of false worship. This message centers on the issue of worship: “If anyone worships the beast.”

Debates over worship are nothing new in the church. Arguments abound about what is acceptable worship—open worship, free worship, traditional worship, private worship, corporate worship, worship songs, worship drama, and so on.

A neutral observer might conclude that worship is about the participants. In reality, worship that focuses on the worshippers is really nothing more than spiritual narcissism, religious idolatry, or if you prefer, beast worship.

In the words of Chris Rice: “True worship of God is not dressing up our words and our vocal parts and our bodies and impressing Him with ourselves. True worship is to lay ourselves bare before God.” As A. W. Tozer put it: “Worship is the knowledge of the holy.”

In the last days, God’s remnant church will call attention to authentic, biblical worship. This worship will not occur on a day of people’s choosing, but on the Sabbath day that was sanctified at the time of Creation. It is worship that is not fixated on the preferences of humans but on the passion of ascribing worth to our Holy God.
Salvation by Faith vs. Salvation by Works

The second issue that arises in the third angel’s message pits salvation by faith against salvation by works. Ellen White offers this insight: “The theme of greatest importance is the third angel’s message, embracing the messages of the first and second angels. All should understand the truths contained in these messages and demonstrate them in daily life, for this is essential to salvation.”

Why is this message so important? It is important because the eternal destinies of all human beings hinge on this central issue brought to bear by the third angel—the issue of worship. Will your loyalties be reserved only for God? Or will you compromise for a counterfeit god who blasphemes the Most High God?

In God’s kingdom, salvation comes freely to all who accept what Jesus did on the cross. In the counterfeit kingdom of the evil one, salvation must be earned by works. “But beware,” says the angel, for “there is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast.” Rest comes only to those who depend fully on Jesus for everything—life, freedom, and salvation.

An example of this rest comes in the gift of the Sabbath—the day that God ordained for worship. After all, Sabbath observance is the marvelous response to what Jesus has done for us.

Think about what Jesus has done. He took our punishment for sin. That means we never need to worry about being good enough for heaven. This gift is not based on what we do; it’s based on what Jesus has done. Period. It has nothing to do with going to church on a certain day, or abstaining from pork, or paying tithe. We are saved only by faith in Jesus. Because of Calvary, Jesus gives us what we cannot earn—right standing with God (see Rom. 3:21-24). We cannot add to what Jesus has done.

The Sabbath, then, is the ideal response to this gift. It reminds us to rest from our endless struggle to be good enough. In our frenzy to try to earn our salvation by good works, God whispers the gift of the Sabbath as a reminder to rest.

Isn’t it ironic that John the revelator tells us that this matter of worship will be a central issue in the closing chapters of this earth’s history? So relax, fellow pilgrim; the work has been done at Calvary and His grace is sufficient for you.

Seal of God vs. Mark of the Beast

A final dichotomy that emerges in this text contrasts the seal of God with the mark of the beast. In Revelation 14, John describes two camps of people just before Jesus returns. The first group worships the beast and receives its mark—they submit to its authority and to the visible expression of it in obedience to a truncated law, a law into which a human commandment was inserted. The second group contains the true followers of Jesus who “remain faithful” and “obey God’s commandments.”

Counterfeit Christians receive the mark of the beast. Genuine Christians receive the counterpart of the mark of the beast, which is the seal of God. This seal is symbolically described as having the name of God and the Lamb written on the forehead. It means that the remnant reflect the character of God in their lives. They remain loyal to their Savior. They resolve to “obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). They obey all the commandments—including the fourth. Ellen White writes: “The Sabbath of the fourth commandment is the seal of the living God.”

Jesus kept the Sabbath. Thus He set an example for His followers. We don’t observe the Sabbath to merit salvation, but to express our loyalty and worship to the Lord we love.

Rosa Cornelia Veal tells of meeting a woman named Ruby Free: “I met her when she was conducting a Holy Land tour. She must have a secret, I said to myself enviously. How else can she accomplish so much, so easily? She was a good listener, a trouble-shooter, an organizer, a mother hen to 72 tourists, plus her own two children; yet she was never tired, never out of sorts.

“Then, back home, I visited Ruby. And I think I discovered her secret. There it was, a two-word motto over her sink: ‘YES, LORD.’”

Such is the motto of God’s remnant. “Yes, Lord.” Because they enjoy an intimate friendship with Him, their prayer will be: “If Jesus worshipped on the Sabbath and You invite me to follow His example, then, ‘Yes, Lord!’”

So what about you? God is asking: “Will you participate in My mission of hope? Will you rest in the work of My Son, Jesus? Will you remain faithful to Me?”

How He longs to hear two words: “Yes, Lord!”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING

1. Does everyone who worships on Sabbath necessarily have the seal of God? What about the Jews?

2. The author emphasizes the words “Yes, Lord.” What is their significance in the context of this reading?


1 Ellen G. White, Evangelism, p. 196 (Letter 97, 1902, quoted at www.sdab.org/BOL%20Research/3ANGMESS.htm).


3 Concepts about the Sabbath adapted from Jon Paulien, What the Bible Says About the End-time (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 126-129.

The story is told of a restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia, with a peculiar name. It’s called The Church of God Grill. It didn’t start as a restaurant but rather as a church with the mission of reaching the city of Atlanta with the gospel.

Then one Sunday after church the members sold chicken dinners to address a financial crisis. It proved to be a good way to score some quick cash. Soon customers liked the chicken so much that the church leaders had to trim back the worship service in order to accommodate the swelling crowds at the restaurant. In time the church service just got in the way of the booming chicken business, so they dropped the “God” part in order to focus on the grill. Sometimes it’s possible to forget what business you are in.

Mission gets murky. Distractions pollute purpose. Urgency trumps what is important.

Now consider our church. What business are we in?

Certainly at the heart of our business is the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, 20, right? Jesus said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

But couldn’t every Christian church claim that as their business? I hope that our journey together this week has helped to sharpen our understanding of the unique calling we share as Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Of course, we are called to make disciples of all nations, but how are we to accomplish this?

The prophetic calling of Revelation 14 identifies our unique voice at a critical time in earth’s history.

Consider once again the sobering words of the message we are called to herald: “A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath’” (Rev. 14:9, 10; cf. verses 11, 12).

Clearly our mission of hope will expose God’s true character; central to His character we find both justice and mercy. But are they incongruous? Where is the good news amid our message of fury and torment?
How can we fulfill our mission of proclaiming a message that at first glance appears to extol contradictory virtues? Using the third angel’s message as our template, let’s explore these two attributes of God that we are commissioned to proclaim.

**Proclaiming the Justice of God**

The good news of Revelation 14 is that God is a God of justice. He will not allow sin to go unpunished. And aren’t you thankful? After all, the demand for justice is hardwired into our human DNA. If you doubt that, consider this story shared by Pastor Bill Hybels of an 8-year-old girl from Salem, Massachusetts, who has been undergoing intensive psychological therapy in a desperate attempt to put her shattered life back together again. The trauma dates back to the night she spent at a friend’s house. Somewhere in the predawn hours, her friend’s father entered the bedroom she was sleeping in and abused her. If that wasn’t bad enough, a few hours later he assaulted her again.

Fortunately, this girl had the courage to tell her parents what happened. Unfortunately, when her case came to court and her perpetrator was found guilty of the crime, the judge suspended the sentence and released the man because in his opinion the child abuser didn’t fit the profile of a chronic offender. Meanwhile, this 8-year-old girl is terrorized by knowing that this man who violated her is on the loose and suffered no punishment for his crime.

Does that true story make you sick to your stomach? Probably so. Why? Because deep within every human spirit is this longing for justice. We agree that wrongdoing should not go unpunished, don’t we? So it is that judgment is good news. In the words of Cornel West: “Justice is what love looks like in public.”

As Adventists we can preach with assurance in these last days that evil will not have the last word. Our loving God will not ignore sin. The day of accounting will come for all those who choose the mark of the beast, and they “will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.”

The apostle Paul put it this way: “God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power” (2 Thess. 1:6-9).

I hope you didn’t skim over the line about punishment coming to those who “do not know God.” At the end of time, the difference between life and death, heaven and hell, is our relationship with Jesus. The key question at the time of accounting will be this: Do you know God? If the answer is yes, then on the day of judgment you will find mercy.

**Proclaiming the Mercy of God**

The good news of God’s mercy, then, is the second part of our dual message. Remember how the three angels’ messages end: “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). Be patient, my brothers and sisters. Anyone who obeys God’s commandments and remains faithful to Jesus has nothing to fear. Instead, we can look forward to the end of time because we know that on that day we will receive only mercy from our loving God.

Frederick Buechner reminds us that “the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully.”

Judgment is an act of love. Forget the popular notions about hell that would suggest that God is an angry taskmaster who revels in torturing His children for a fiery eternity. The eternal death of the wicked is an expression of God’s love in that He reluctantly grants them what they had chosen. He did all He could to avoid that situation when Jesus went to a bloody cross to secure for His beloved children a place forever with Him.

John records: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God’” (Rev. 21:3).

Herein is the essence of heaven—we will be with God! Only then will our hearts and our hungers be fully satisfied.

The psalmist writes: “But as for me, my contentment is not in wealth but in seeing you and knowing all is well between us. And when I awake in heaven, I will be fully satisfied, for I will see you face to face” (Ps. 17:15, TLB).†

Soon we will be in the presence of our merciful God forever. This is heaven. So never give up hope. Stay on mission. Someday soon we will see our God! Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. ■

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†Verses marked TLB are taken from *The Living Bible*, copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Ill. Used by permission.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING**

1. What is the business of the church?
2. How can we avoid being sidetracked from this business?
3. Explain how God’s justice and mercy work together.
The third angel is represented as flying through the midst of heaven, symbolizing the work of those who proclaim the first, second, and third angels’ messages; all are linked together. The evidences of the abiding, ever-living truth of these grand messages, that mean so much to us, that have awakened such intense opposition from the religious world, are not extinct. Satan is constantly seeking to cast his hellish shadow about these messages, so that the remnant people of God shall not clearly discern their import, their time and place; but they live, and are to exert their power upon our religious experience while time shall last.

The influence of these messages has been deepening and widening, setting in motion the springs of action in thousands of hearts, bringing into existence institutions of learning, publishing houses, and health institutions; all these are the instrumentalities of God to co-operate in the grand work represented by the first, second, and third angels flying through the midst of heaven, to warn the inhabitants of the world that Christ is coming the second time, with power and great glory. . . .

[As the end approaches,] we are to maintain the truth because it is truth, in face of the bitterest opposition. God is at work upon human minds; it is not man alone that is
working. The great illuminating power is from Christ; the brightness of His example is to be kept before the people in every discourse.

The Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus

The rainbow above the throne, the bow of promise, testifies to the whole world that God will never forget His people in their struggle. Let Jesus be our theme. Let us with pen and voice present, not only the commandments of God, but the faith of Jesus. This will promote real heart piety as nothing else can.

While we present the fact that men are subjects of a divine moral government, their reason teaches them that this is truth, that they owe allegiance to Jehovah. This life is our time of probation. We are placed under the discipline and government of God, to form characters and acquire habits for the higher life.

Temptations will come upon us. Iniquity abounds; where you least expect it, dark chapters will open that are most terrible, to weigh down the soul; but we need not fail nor be discouraged while we know that the bow of promise is above the throne of God. We shall be subject to heavy trials, opposition, bereavement, affliction; but we know that Jesus passed through all these. These experiences are valuable to us; the advantages are not by any means confined to this short life; they reach into eternal ages. Through patience, faith, and hope, in all the changing scenes of earth, we are forming characters for everlasting life. Everything shall work together for good to those that love God.

All the scenes of this life in which we must act a part, are to be carefully studied, for they are a part of our education. We should bring solid timbers into our character-building, for we are working both for this life and eternal life. And as we near the close of this earth's history, we advance more rapidly in Christian growth, or we retrograde just as decidedly.

“I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.... And I will remember my covenant, ... and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh” [Gen. 9:13-15]. In the rainbow above the throne is an everlasting testimony, that “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]. Whenever the law is presented before the people, let the teacher of the truth point to the throne arched with the rainbow of promise, the righteousness of Christ.

The glory of the law is Christ; He came to magnify the law, and to make it honorable. Make it appear distinct that mercy and truth have met together in Christ, and righteousness and peace have embraced each other. It is when you are looking to His throne, offering up your penitence and praise and thanksgiving to God, that you perfect Christian character, and represent Christ to the world; you abide in Christ, and Christ abides in you; you have that peace which passes all understanding. We need constantly to meditate upon Christ, His attractive loveliness. We must direct minds to Jesus, fasten them upon Him. In every discourse dwell upon the divine attributes.

God Inspires Hope

As the bow in the cloud is formed by the union of the sunlight and the shower, so the rainbow encircling the throne represents the combined power of mercy and justice. It is not justice alone that is to be maintained, for this would eclipse the glory of the rainbow of promise above the throne; men could see only the penalty of the law. Were there no justice, no penalty, there would be no stability to the government of God. It is the mingling of judgment and mercy that makes salvation full and complete. It is the blending of the two that leads us, as we view the world's Redeemer and the law of Jehovah, to exclaim, “Thy gentleness hath made me great” [2 Sam. 22:36].

We know that the gospel is a perfect and complete system, revealing the immutability of the law of God. It inspires the heart with hope, and with love for God. . . . The salvation that Christ made such a sacrifice to gain for man, is that which is alone of value, that which saves from sin, the cause of all the misery and woe in our world. Mercy extended to the sinner is constantly drawing him to Jesus. If he responds, coming in penitence, with confession, from sin, the cause of all the misery and woe in our world.

Prepare for Christ's Coming

My brother, my sister, I urge you to prepare for the coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven. Day by day cast the love of the world out of your hearts. Understand by experience what it means to have fellowship with Christ. Prepare for the judgment, that when Christ shall come, to be admired in all them that believe, you may be among those who will meet Him in peace. In that day the redeemed will shine forth in the glory of the Father and the Son. The angels, touching their golden harps, will welcome the King and His trophies of victory—those who have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. A song of triumph will peal forth, filling all heaven. Christ has conquered. He enters the heavenly courts, accompanied by His redeemed ones, the witnesses that His mission of suffering and sacrifice has not been in vain.

Our Hope of Reunion

The resurrection and ascension of our Lord is a sure evidence of the triumph of the saints of God over death and the grave, and a pledge that heaven is open to those who wash their robes of character and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. Jesus ascended to the Father as a repre-
sentative of the human race, and God will bring those who reflect His image to behold and share with Him His glory.

There are homes for the pilgrims of earth. There are robes for the righteous, with crowns of glory and palms of victory. All that has perplexed us in the providences of God will in the world to come be made plain. The things hard to be understood will then find explanation. The mysteries of grace will unfold before us. Where our finite minds discovered only confusion and broken promises, we shall see the most perfect and beautiful harmony. We shall know that infinite love ordered the experiences that seemed most trying. As we realize the tender care of Him who makes all things work together for our good, we shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Pain cannot exist in the atmosphere of heaven. In the home of the redeemed there will be no tears, no funeral trains, no badges of mourning. “The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity” [Isa. 33:24]. One rich tide of happiness will flow and deepen as eternity rolls on.

We are still amidst the shadows and turmoil of earthly activities. Let us consider most earnestly the blessed hereafter. Let our faith pierce through every cloud of darkness and behold Him who died for the sins of the world. He has opened the gates of paradise to all who receive and believe on Him. To them He gives power to become the sons and daughters of God.

Hope in Jesus’ Soon Coming

Let the afflictions which pain us so grievously become instructive lessons, teaching us to press forward toward the mark of the prize of our high calling in Christ. Let us be encouraged by the thought that the Lord is soon to come. Let this hope gladden our hearts. “Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” [Heb. 10:37]. Blessed are those servants who, when their Lord comes, shall be found watching.

We are homeward bound. He who loved us so much as to die for us hath builded for us a city. The New Jerusalem is our place of rest. There will be no sadness in the city of God. No wall of sorrow, no dirge of crushed hopes and buried affections, will evermore be heard. Soon the garments of heaviness will be changed for the wedding garment. Soon we shall witness the coronation of our King. Those whose lives have been hidden with Christ, those who on this earth have fought the good fight of faith, will shine forth with the Redeemer’s glory in the kingdom of God.

It will not be long till we shall see Him in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered. And in His presence, all the trials and sufferings of this life will be as nothingness. “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” [verses 35-37]. Look up, look up, and let your faith continually increase. Let this faith guide you along the narrow path that leads through the gates of the city of God into the great beyond, the wide, unbounded future of glory that is for the redeemed.

Questions for Reflection and Sharing

1. How relevant are the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 to life in the world today?

2. What are you most looking forward to when Jesus comes again?
FIRST SABBATH

Dangerous Mission!

Memory Gem

“God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life” (John 3:16).∗

Readiness

Show the children pictures or newspaper clippings of daring and risky missions such as climbing Mount Everest or rescuing those trapped in a storm. Then ask, “Would you have joined such a mission? Why?”

Story

Jared was awakened by the telephone at 2:00 a.m. “Yes, sir, I’ll be on my way,” he answered briskly. Putting on his uniform speedily and grabbing his rescue pack, he dashed off to the Army headquarters helicopter unit.

“Let’s go! People are drowning!” shouted his commander.

The helicopter flew off with six of them for a rescue mission. The winds were strong and visibility was poor. They had to battle the storm that was increasing its strength every minute. Jared and his teammates were straining their eyes to look out for people who might be stranded on rooftops, apartments, or treetops.

“Look! Two kids on the roof!” yelled Jared. “Get down close.”

The pilot lowered the chopper and immediately Jared and his teammate Ken jumped down to the rooftop on ropes wound around their waists. Just as they stretched out their hands to reach the children, a strong gust of wind swung them farther away. The chopper tried moving closer again for a second attempt.

“Mommy! Mommy!” cried the little girl, who looked wet and cold under a blanket.

Jared and Ken tried a third time to land on the roof, and they made it!

“You’ll be OK,” Jared told the little girl as he grabbed her waist and together they were lifted up to the chopper. “We’ll find your mommy,” he comforted her.

At the same time Ken grabbed the hand of the older brother, covered his shivering body, and together they were also lifted up to safety. The chopper circled around the house twice before flying off to safety. It was a rough day! It was a dangerous mission! That day Jared and his team rescued more than 150 people. Although they were exhausted, Jared felt happy and satisfied. Though it was a dangerous mission, it had saved many precious lives.

Lesson

Jesus, the Son of God, was sent on a similar mission to this world to save all of us who have disobeyed God and sinned against Him. Even before Jesus was born, the angel Gabriel told His mother, Mary, “You must give him the name Jesus. That is because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus the Messiah would be com-
ing to this earth to bring hope and healing to everyone on earth. “He suffered the things we should have suffered. He took on himself the pain that should have been ours. . . . But the servant was pierced because we had sinned. He was crushed because we had done what was evil. He was punished to make us whole again. His wounds have healed us” (Isa. 53:4, 5).

Yes, Jesus Himself came on a mission of hope to rescue us from this sinful world so as to give us eternal life. This is wonderful news! But we must share such good news with others so that they too can receive this hope. Hence, Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission to go and teach others to become His disciples (Matt. 28:19, 20).

This command of sharing the good news with all people is also for us today. The storms of sin and temptation reach hurricane force. Children and families in our world need Jesus to save them from attack. God needs us to go on rescue missions for Him to bring them hope.

Application
Make a list of mission projects kids your age can do to bring the good news to their friends and neighbors. Discuss with your parents or Sabbath school teacher about how they can help you implement some of these project plans.

Discussion
1. What message of hope can you share with a refugee when they and their family have just lost everything in an earthquake?
2. How can Jesus help you in your daily life when you are tempted to cheat in an examination or tell a lie to your parents?
3. Suppose a refugee from Satan’s storm of temptation comes to worship in your church. What could kids do that would spoil their mission of hope? What could you do to help the mission?

Activity
Write the phrase Mission of Hope on colored paper and decorate it using marker pens, sequins, or other materials. Paste a picture of Jesus at the center of the mission of hope and then paste pictures of people you want to be included in Jesus’ mission of hope. Hang the completed work in your room.

Yeas, it is easier, but he wants people to know how serious and important this message is. All the bikers want to appear in person to share the good news of saving the forest and the oceans,” Mom explained.

Halle and her parents arrived at the pier in time to see hundreds of people waving green flags and cheering the 50 bikers on their cross-country mission. “Uncle John is over there!” Halle signaled excitedly to her dad.

“Goodbye, Uncle John! Don’t forget to write,” Halle shouted.

A week went by and at breakfast one morning Mom held up a card.

“A postcard from Uncle John!” she exclaimed.

“Did he spread the good news yet?” Halle wanted to know.

“Yes, Halle! They stopped at Hillsdale and Fernwood and people welcomed them. They passed out flyers and talked to many on how to save the environment,” Mom explained.

“Wonderful! Guess John still has many more towns to cover,” exclaimed Dad.

“It’s a long trip across the country,” Mom sighed.

“Can I go on a bike-a-thon, Mom?” asked Halle eagerly. “I want to tell other children about the good news of Jesus.”

“Definitely! How about starting a bike-a-thon around our neighborhood first?” Mom suggested.

“OK!” Halle exclaimed. “Tomorrow I will ride my bike over to Jenny’s to share Jesus.”

“I support that!” Dad added enthusiastically. “Just as long as Mom rides with you.”

Lesson
We may be too young to cycle across the country or around the world on our own, but we can always go on a neighborhood bike-a-thon for Jesus. Jesus was very clear in His command when He told His disciples, “Then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem. You will be my witnesses in all Judea, and Samaria. And you will be...
my witnesses from one end of the earth to the other” (Acts 1:8). He was asking them to first start witnessing at home, then move out to their neighborhood, and finally to other areas of the earth.

Jesus’ Great Commission to His disciples is also for us today. He is asking us to go and spread this good news right where we live!

Does it seem too big a task for you? Don’t worry, Jesus has promised us: “My grace is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak” (2 Cor. 12:9).

The apostle Paul went on a walkathon to share the gospel with many nations and people. He also traveled in a boat to Corinth, Thessalonica, and Cyprus to spread the good news of salvation. You too can join a walkathon or bike-a-thon and share Jesus with your neighbors who don’t know Him.

Application

Make three cards with the message “Jesus Loves You.” Decorate the cards and share them with three friends who do not know Jesus.

Discussion

1. What is the good news of Jesus? (that He died in our place for our sin so we can live forever with Him)
2. Is it really possible to spread the good news of Jesus around the world? Is He asking us to do something impossible?
3. Can you suggest a few new ways of sharing the good news? What about a prayer-a-thon?

Activity

Unscramble the following words that relate to Jesus’ Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19, 20.

PBEZATI  STOANIN  LDSIPCEIS
YOLH  PITSIR  RFHETA
YEOB  HECTA

Answer: baptized, nations, disciples, Holy Spirit.

MONDAY
A Fair Judge

Memory Gem
“I will sing about your love and fairness. Lord, I will sing praise to you” (Ps. 101:1).

Readiness
Group children into fours and show them five paintings. Ask each group to judge the two best ones for display in the room. Then ask, “Was it easy for you to judge these paintings? Did each group agree with the two best paintings? Was it easy to be fair and unbiased?”

Story
“Hurry up, Kathy! I need to be at the Spring Flower Festival in half an hour,” Mom called out impatiently.
“Come on, put your shoes on in the car,” Mom suggested as she grabbed her bag and headed for the car.

The annual Spring Flower Festival was the highlight of Riversdale. Each spring more than 300 types of flowers would be entered for the competition. There would be tulips, daffodils, azaleas, chrysanthemums, and many more. This year was special because Mom was going to be one of the six judges for the show!

“Oh! Look, Dad, I just love the yellow daffodils!” Kathy exclaimed.

“How is Mom going to judge which is the best? I don’t think I can,” Kathy said seriously.

“You’re right. It’s not easy to be a judge. A judge has to be fair and truthful,” Dad explained.

After what seemed like a long day, Kathy and Dad joined many others in the main hall to wait for the announcement of the competition winners.

“The Blue Ribbon Award for the healthiest variety this year goes to Jeannie Jones,” Mom announced excitedly. “And honorable mention is given to . . .”

Many women gathered around the Blue Ribbon Award flower to admire its beauty. It was a tulip with double petals in three shades of red. Kathy thought the judges were pretty accurate and fair. But as she moved on to other tables to look at other flowers, she overheard a couple of women criticizing the judges’ decision.

“I think Rita Stubb’s tulip should be given the Blue Ribbon Award instead,” the first woman complained.

“Yeah, I agree with you. The judges seem to favor the east side,” agreed the second woman.

“I heard that Jeannie Jones is related to one of the judges,” the first woman insinuated.

That’s not fair, Kathy thought to herself. How dare they blame Mom for being a poor judge! Dad said it was hard to be a judge.

She must tell this to Mom. Having made up her mind, Kathy ran off to look for her. Mom was indeed a good judge, not the type of judge who played favorites.

Lesson
The Bible tells us that God is going to judge everything we do in our life before Jesus comes again. King Solomon reminds us that “God will judge everything, whether it’s good or evil” (Eccl. 12:14). All of us have been given lots of time to repent and say we’re sorry for our sins, and Jesus wants to bring us home to heaven with Him soon.

So judgment must come, but Jesus loves us so much
He will judge us kindly and fairly. Remember the parable of the talents told by Jesus? Matthew 25:19 tells of a master (Jesus) who returns from a long trip to judge the results of his servants’ investments. The one who received five talents and the one who received two were judged to be faithful in multiplying their gifts and were greatly rewarded. The one who was given one talent but who did nothing to multiply and increase it was judged unfaithful, and his one gift was taken away from him. This story teaches that in the end everyone must give an account of what he or she has done.

But judgment is really good news! There is nothing to be frightened about because that is the time Jesus will be coming to take us home with Him. In fact, when Jesus the King comes again, “all the angels will come with Him. Then He will sit on his throne in the glory of heaven. All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate the people into two groups. He will be like a shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25:31, 32).

The most important thing we need to do is to admit our wrongs to Jesus, telling Him that we are sorry for our sins. The Bible has promised: “If we admit that we have sinned, he will forgive us our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure” (1 John 1:9). So let’s be prepared every day for Jesus to keep our hope bright. And in the judgment He will declare us free from sin forever. Just think! You will live with Jesus forever and not make any more mistakes.

Application
Make a list of ideas on how you can be prepared for the day when Jesus comes to judge this earth. Share it with your friends in your class.

Discussion
1. In what way is judgment a joyful event? How can you calm your friend who views judgment as a “fearful and dreadful day”?

2. Name two parables given by Jesus that talk about judgment taking place when He comes again.

Activity
Write a poem or song about God being a loving and fair judge. Share it with some friends in your class.

TUESDAY
Special Thursday!

Memory Gem
“Come, let us bow down and worship him. Let us fall on our knees in front of the Lord our Maker” (Ps. 95:6).

Readiness
On a flip chart or a chalkboard, write “Our Special Time.” Ask, “If you have a special day with just your mom or your dad, what would you like to do together? Why is it fun to have special times with just Mom or Dad?”

Story
“I’m home, Dad!” Tanada called excitedly as he closed the front door and dashed upstairs to change his clothes. Soon he heard someone closing the kitchen door.

“Hey, son, are you ready?” Dad called out from downstairs. “Just give me a minute to change.”

Yes, Thursday was Tanada and Dad’s special day together at the volleyball court! Dad would get home around 4:00, and then father and son would spend time doing fun things together. Their favorite game was playing volleyball at the local community center with several other family teams. After an exciting game they usually stopped by the ice-cream parlor. Some Thursdays were spent shopping for bicycle parts or visiting a music store. The best thing for Tanada was that he had Dad all to himself every Thursday afternoon! Just the two of them!

Last Thursday after their volleyball game, they visited Dad’s friend who was hospitalized with pneumonia. Dad promised to fix his broken window the following week. Every Thursday Tanada and Dad would think of something interesting to do together.

“This is just like the Sabbath,” Dad remarked once when they were together.

“You’re correct,” Dad continued, “but Sabbath is like our special time with God. We worship Him, sing songs to praise Him, and do things that will please Him. We do this every week at the same time . . . on Sabbath!”

Oh, yes, Tanada loves to sing at Sabbath school, have special prayers for his friends, and enjoy a story at Children’s Church. Worshipping God is exciting!

Can you imagine? Now Tanada has two “special times” each week—one on Thursday with his dad, the other on Sabbath with Jesus. He looks forward to both of them!

Lesson
When Jesus was on earth, He enjoyed His “special time” with God.
He went to the synagogue to worship. He loved to read from the big Scripture scrolls. Luke 4:16 tells us that “Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. On the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as he usually did. And he stood up to read.” His disciples Peter, James, John, and others went to the Temple to worship God, too. The apostle Paul met with many believers in the church each Sabbath. It was a wonderful time to sing and praise God together and to listen to Paul preach about Jesus.

Apart from the Sabbath, Jesus also loved to talk to God alone during His special time with Him. The Bible recorded that “on one of those days, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray. He spent the night praying to God” (Luke 6:12). Just think, Jesus enjoyed talking to His Father the whole night. It was a special time for Father and Son!

Don’t you want to raise your voices to praise God too? The psalmist urges us “Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Father and Son! Yes, our hope rests on the day when we will be able to enjoy “our special time” with Jesus and God forever. It won’t be just on Sabbath, or on Thursday. It will be every day forever!

**Activity**

Look up the following Bible verses to discover a key requirement for spending our special time with God in eternity.

- 1 Samuel 15:22
- Isaiah 1:19
- Acts 5:29
- Exodus 19:5

**WEDNESDAY**

**Reunited at Last!**

**Memory Gem**

“Be strong, all of you who put your hope in the Lord. Never give up” (Ps. 31:24).

**Readiness**

Show the children pictures of children and adults with sad expressions. Then ask: “What is the common expression seen on the faces in all these pictures? Fearful? Hopeless? Sad? What does it mean to feel hopeless or lost?”

**Story**

“Mama, Mama, where are you?” cried 6-year-old Karli as she clasped tightly to her dirty blanket. Everyone seemed to be running everywhere, some carrying bags, clothes, and whatever they could find. Karli remembered following her mother and two brothers out of the door to get onto a bus when suddenly a loud bang was heard across the street. She turned around to see what the matter was, but forgot to hang on to Mama’s hands.

“Casto, Casto!” Karli called anxiously for her brother.

But there was no Mama or Casto. It was simply too confusing to know what to do. Everybody seemed to be running. So where could Mama be? Fear gripped Karli as she was crying and running to look for Mama. She walked and walked till she couldn’t walk anymore. All hope of finding Mama was dashed. Suddenly, she fell to the ground and fainted.

“Wake up, wake up!” Karli felt someone gently tapping her face.

“Mama! Casto!” Karli cried loudly as she regained consciousness. Looking around her, she realized that she was on the lap of a strange woman.

“It’s OK! We’ll help you find your mama!” the stranger assured Karli.

“Really?” Karli gasped. “Thank you, ma’am.”

“I’m from the Red Cross and we have sent someone to look for your mama,” the stranger reassured Karli again.

“Can I pray to Jesus to help me find Mama?” Karli asked shyly.

“Definitely! Jesus knows where your mama is,” the woman replied, smiling.

After saying a short prayer, Karli got up and ate some food. Even after a full meal she felt lonely, frightened, and hopeless. Was there any hope of ever seeing Mama again? Clutching her dirty blanket, Karli cried herself to sleep that night.

Everything around her looked so unfamiliar. Next morning she could hear people shouting and running outside. Cars and trucks were honking endlessly. But Karli felt lost and without hope!

Suddenly, she heard some familiar voices coming into her room. Her heart started to beat faster and faster. Could it be? Was she imagining things? Would her hope come true? The voices got louder and closer.

“My! Mama!” Karli shouted excitedly as she ran out to see for herself.

“Karli, Karli, my girl!” Mama cried as she rushed forward to hug her little lost girl.

“I thought I would never see you again,” Mama cried softly as she lifted Karli and held her close. “Thank God!”

“Mama, I am so happy! I didn’t lose hope of finding you!” added Karli with
a smile as she held on to Mama’s hand.

**Lesson**

Just think—people like you and me are lost in this world. Storms of sin, disease, and temptation blot out any hope of a future. People hate each other; there are wars and killing. In fact, Jesus told us that before He comes again, “nation will fight against nation. Kingdom will fight against kingdom. People will go hungry. There will be earthquakes in many places” (Matt. 24:7).

Look at the disasters that have killed thousands of people these past years—the tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, Cyclone Nargis, and earthquakes in China. Look at the Iran and Iraq wars, the fear of terrorism and other bad things people do to other people. No one seems to have solutions. People everywhere are looking for something better, but they don’t seem to know where to find it.

But we do. The Bible reminds us that true hope is found only in Jesus. The apostle Paul agreed wholeheartedly when he said, “God has chosen to make known to them the glorious riches of that mystery. He has made it known among those who aren’t Jews. And here is what it is. Christ is in you. He is your hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

This is the hope we can share with our friends and neighbors when they are depressed and discouraged over life and its many problems. Invite them to church to find this hope in Jesus that gives them peace. Remember, “Blessed are those who depend on the God of Jacob for help. Blessed are those who put their hope in the Lord their God” (Ps. 146:5).

That’s what Karli did when she placed her hope in Jesus to help her find her mama.

**Application**

Have children make special cards in the shape of hearts and decorate them with a picture of Jesus. Write in the verse: “Christ is in you. He is your hope of glory!” Encourage them to share their cards with children in the hospital, neighbors, or seniors in a nursing home.

**Discussion**

1. What does it mean to feel hopeless? Identify some “feeling” words.

2. Can you think of any time in your life when you felt lost or hopeless? Share it with your class.

3. We place our hope in Jesus when we give Him our worries and stop worrying ourselves. Can you tell of a time when you did that?

**Activity**

Play this fun game by guessing the names of the following individuals who placed their hopes in Jesus despite difficult circumstances.

a. Suddenly he lost everything including his wealth, property, and family members. ____________

b. She had lost all hope of healing after seeking many doctors for 12 years. ____________

c. Though he was enslaved in a foreign land, he never lost hope in God and was rewarded with high positions in the king’s court. ____________

d. She placed her hope in God to save her and her people from being destroyed by a wicked officer of the court. ____________

e. He preached fervently about hope in Jesus throughout his missionary journeys. ____________

**THURSDAY**

_Loyal Till_

**the End**

**Memory Gem**

“Be faithful, even if it means you must die. Then I will give you a crown. The crown is life itself” (Rev. 2:10).

**Readiness**

Prepare five to six cards, each listing a different loyal or disloyal behavior such as criticizing, encouraging, lying, honesty, gossiping, defending. Draw a line in the middle of the room and mark one side LOYAL, and the other side DISLOYAL. Read out each behavior, and if the children think that the behavior represents loyalty, they are to move to the LOYAL side. If they think the behavior illustrates a disloyal act, they should move to the DISLOYAL side. After all the cards have been read, discuss briefly what loyalty means.

**Story**

“Keeping His holy day! What nonsense is this?” Major Park barked loudly.

“Sir, Private Brown takes his religion seriously,” Sergeant Caldwell explained, “and he doesn’t carry arms either.”

“No guns! No Saturdays! What’s he doing in the army?” Major Park shouted.

Melvin Brown wrestled through the night in a corner of his bunk, praying that Jesus would give him strength to get through this trial. At 18 Melvin had to be conscripted into the army for two years. There were no exceptions.

His parents prayed with him before he left and read him many Bible texts that could help him through tough times. Yes, he remembered Matthew 19:26: “With man, that is impossible. But with God, all things are possible.” He was definitely counting on God to work the impossible right there in the camp!

“Don’t worry about being faithful in the army. God will understand!” Melvin turned around to see who was talking to him, but could see nobody. But he was certain that he heard that voice loud and clear across the room.
God,” Melvin replied boldly. “Jesus, help me through today. I want to be loyal and faithful to You,” Melvin whispered as he fell into line for the morning roll call.

“Private Brown, report to the camp commander!” Sergeant Caldwell’s order came through loud and clear. There was no escape now!

Melvin’s heart pounded rapidly as he knocked on Major Park’s door. “You’ve got bad records, my boy! You have been thrown out of two camps within one month,” the major snarled. “Who do you think you are? You refuse to train on Saturdays and refuse to carry guns. You have violated the law of the land! It means court-martial!”

“Sir, the Bible teaches us to keep Saturday holy,” Melvin answered boldly.

“Be prepared for court-martial tomorrow at 9:00 a.m.,” Major Park commanded.

A court-martial is a military court. It can determine severe punishment for soldiers. Wow! Melvin had never been to a court before, not to mention being tried in one.

It was the worst night Melvin had ever experienced. He called Mom and Dad, who prayed with him on the phone. They continued to encourage him to trust God to do the impossible.

“Remember Isaiah 40:31, son,” his mother said quietly over the phone. Isaiah 40:31 kept surfacing through Melvin’s mind all night long. “Those who trust in the Lord will receive new strength. They will fly as high as eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not grow weak.”

“Lord, I urgently need those eagle’s wings! I am depending on Your promise,” Melvin prayed.

Several military officers were seated in the room when Melvin arrived for his trial.

“Private, are you willing to go to jail for your faith?” Lieutenant Lee asked scornfully.

“Yes, sir! I want to be faithful to God,” Melvin replied boldly.

“Faith—that’s not worth dying for!” Major Park retorted. “Faith does not exist today!”

After a half hour of questions, Major Park delivered the sentence. “Three weeks in jail and $250 fine!”

Soon everyone left the room and Colonel Brandt, shaking his head, came up to Melvin.

“I can’t believe we still have modern chaps like you who would be loyal to their God—even at the risk of going to prison,” the colonel exclaimed. “Beginning tomorrow I am the new officer in command of your camp. I admire your loyalty. Our country needs people like you who stand for what they believe.” The colonel smiled as he gave Melvin a strong handshake.

“I’m going to let you off on Saturdays, but you must work every Sunday to make up for it. As for guns, you are assigned to pick up all those blanks after the others have practiced their shooting every day.”

Tears streamed down Melvin’s cheeks even before the colonel had finished. How could it be? He heard the jail sentence, yet God turned it into something good!

“Mom! Dad! I’ve received wings of eagles! With God all things are possible!” Melvin exclaimed excitedly on the phone.

**Lesson**

God wants us to be loyal and faithful to Him in everything we do. Time and time again He calls His people to come back to Him. In the time of Elijah, God called His people out of idolatry to get rid of Baal and worship Him as the one true God. In Revelation 14 God again calls to us: “Have respect for God. Give him glory. The hour has come for God to judge. Worship him who made the heavens and the earth. Worship him who made the sea and the springs of water” (Rev. 14:7). He wants us to worship and be loyal to Him.

The world offers us many attractive things—money, fame, clothes, computer games, and lots of stuff! But Jesus reminds us: “Put God’s kingdom first. Do what he wants you to do. Then all of those things will also be given to you” (Matt. 6:33). Yes, don’t put your faith in the money and wealth of this world, for they can all disappear overnight.

Just think! It is more lasting to place our loyalty in God, who says: “I am the First and the Last. I am the one and only God” (Isa. 44:6). God is calling us out of all these false worships in the world to accept His eternal seal. This seal signifies we belong to His special group. When we accept His invitation to be loyal to Him, we accept His gift of life forever. We are His chosen people when we make that choice!

**Application**

Think of some ways you could be loyal and faithful to Jesus till the end. Share your ideas with two friends and pray together that God will help you be loyal to Him so that you will receive His eternal seal.

**Discussion**

1. What does it mean to receive God’s seal?

2. Do you have a special friend who has not accepted Jesus? How can that person accept God’s invitation to be His chosen one?

**Activity**

Have the students form small groups and develop a skit or drama that illustrates loyalty to God. Then have them act it out for the entire class.

**FRIDAY**

**A Merciful Teacher**

**Memory Gem**

“But Lord, you are a God who is tender and kind. You are gracious. You are slow to get angry. You are faithful and full of love” (Ps. 86:15).

**Readiness**

On a flip chart write the word “Merciful.” Ask the children to help you list the characteristics of a merciful person. Discuss each briefly.
Story

“Carina, see me at the counselor’s room right before lunch,” demanded Mrs. Garcia, who had just collected the final set of exam papers from her fifth-grade class.

“Carina, you acted strangely this morning during the science exam,” Mrs. Garcia remarked.

“No, I didn’t do anything different!” Carina replied.

“Are you sure you have nothing to tell me?” Mrs. Garcia prodded further.

“Nothing! Nothing!” Carina replied emphatically.

“I will be very sad if you aren’t telling me the truth,” replied Mrs. Garcia.

While Carina and her teacher sat silently for a minute, Carina nervously and incessantly twirled the corner of her jacket. Soon Mrs. Garcia broke the silence.

“Carina, please take off your cap now,” Mrs. Garcia quieted asked.

“No! No! No! You can’t ask me to remove my cap!” Carina retorted angrily.

“I believe you have something in there that I should see,” the teacher explained.

After two more requests from her teacher, Carina just broke down and sobbed loudly. Finally she spoke.

“I’m so sorry, Mrs. Garcia, I cheated!” Carina confessed as she removed her cap to reveal a piece of paper with lots of answers on it.

“You deserve to get an F on your exam,” Mrs. Garcia gasped, “but I know this is the first time you have done such a thing.”

“I’m so ashamed of myself. Can Jesus forgive me for such a terrible sin?” Carina asked sadly.

“Yes, He can. Jesus always forgives our sins as long as we confess them and ask for His forgiveness,” Mrs. Garcia reassured Carina. “I’ll forgive you, too, Carina, but you have to bear the consequences.”

“I’ll give you a second science exam next week, but it will be a new set of questions,” Mrs. Garcia promised.

Thank you, Mrs. Garcia. I will make sure I won’t mess up again!” Carina replied gratefully. “I will also tell my mom and dad about this tonight. Thanks for being kind and merciful!”

Lesson

Yes, we don’t deserve God’s mercy and kindness when we do wrong things that hurt our friends or parents, but David tells us in Psalm 78:38: “He was full of tender love. He forgave their sins and didn’t destroy his people.” John the apostle tells us: “God is faithful and fair. If we admit that we have sinned, he will forgive us our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure” (1 John 1:9).

Do you remember how many times Israel forgot God’s leading in their lives, leaving Him to worship idols and foreign gods? Time and time again the Israelites grumbled, complained, and left God, yet He still chose to forgive them and show them kindness. God said to them: “Israel, you have not been faithful. . . . Return to me. Then I will look on you with favor again. My love is faithful,” announces the Lord. ‘I will not be angry with you forever’” (Jer. 3:12).

Yes, God is a just and merciful God and He is calling us to choose Him. Jesus’ mission to this earth was to help us see God’s loving, kind, and forgiving character. If we choose God, we will live forever with Him in heaven.

Application

On a sheet of paper write a letter to God telling Him how you feel, knowing He forgives you and shows you mercy. Read your prayer to a friend.

Discussion

1. How is being merciful related to forgiveness? Do these two always go together?

2. Can you think of any time in your life when someone showed you mercy? How did you feel at the time?

Activity

Sing the song “God Is So Good!” illustrate this song with pictures or your own drawing and be ready to share it with your class.

SECOND SABBATH

My Special Club

Memory Gem

“God’s people need to be very patient. They are the ones who obey God’s commands. They remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

Readiness

Show pictures of the different clubs one can belong to—such as Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Pathfinders, etc. Ask, “What are the requirements to belong to such clubs?” “What’s so special about belonging to a club?” List their answers on a flip chart.

Story

“Hey, Paul! Do you have your uniform yet?” Prakash asked excitedly as the scouts marched in formation on the blacktop.

“No yet! I hope to soon,” Paul replied in a loud whisper.

“Guess what? Our club has been chosen to participate in the parade on National Day!” Prakash said.

“Really? Wow! That’s an honor!” Paul exclaimed.

The District 4 Boy Scouts had been practicing twice a week for a month now on their marching drills and group formations. Every move had to be perfect, for each boy represented what the club was known for. All members were instructed to have their uniforms washed and ironed, accompanied by clean shiny boots, well pressed neckerchiefs, sash, and beret.

“Everyone in line . . . left, right, left . . ." Scoutmaster Lee drilled the boys at their midweek meeting.

“No talking! Heads to the front!” he yelled, signaling to a few boys who seemed out of line with the rest.

“Forward march . . . two, three, four; left, two, three, four . . .” the Scoutmaster continued to command and blow his
“Halt!” Scoutmaster Lee finally shouted and gave a blast on his whistle. “What do you boys think you’re doing?” He signaled to Kenny, Karl, and Raj to come forward.

“What do you boys want to be in the parade? Do you belong to our club?” the Scoutmaster demanded.

The three boys apologized for not cooperating and begged to be included in the special event of the club. “Boys, what do Boy Scouts promise to do?” the Scoutmaster asked.

“Everyone, let’s say together . . .”

Immediately, all the Boy Scouts of District 4 repeated their promise loudly and proudly:

“On my honor I will do my best
To do my duty to God and my country
and to obey the Scout Law;
To help other people at all times;
To keep myself physically strong,
mentally awake, and morally straight.”

“Excellent! Yes, we are members of this special club and you are special people!” the Scoutmaster emphasized. And turning to Kenny, Karl, and Raj, he frowned. “So, are you boys in or out of the club? Remember, if you are in, a Scout promises to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent,” Scoutmaster Lee reiterated.

“Sorry, Sir, it will never happen again!” the three boys replied, saluting smartly.

“Let’s continue with our practice. There isn’t much time left before National Day,” the Scoutmaster reminded everyone. “OK, forward march, two, three, four; left, two, three, four . . .”

**Lesson**

Do you know we all belong to an even more special club? That is the “Remnant Club!”

When Jesus comes again, He’ll be looking for people who’ve decided not to get mad or complain when others do evil things to them. He’ll be looking for those who try to be patient when wrongly accused, who’ve kept the commandments of God, and who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

He’ll be looking for those who pray for others and who share this good news with them. The Bible says it will be a small group, but each member will be welcome in heaven.

The apostle John tells us: “Look! He is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him. Even those who pierced him will see him” (Rev. 1:7). Jesus’ mission of hope to this earth will be fulfilled. It seemed a Mission Impossible! Who can imagine the Son of God becoming a little baby on this earth to save you and me from our sins? It is now Mission Possible! Jesus has conquered sin, and our hope in Him will be realized with a permanent reunion with loved ones. So make your choice and determine to belong to this special club!

**Application**

Just think for a moment. Mission Possible! Mission Accomplished! Yes, Jesus’ mission to die for us at Calvary gives us hope to look forward to when He will come in glory. So share this with a friend at school who does not know Jesus. Tell them they can belong to Jesus’ special club too!

**Discussion**

1. Can we buy our way into this special “Remnant Club”? How do we get in? Is it open to all?

2. What three character traits must be found in those who belong to this special remnant club? (Read Rev. 14:12.)

**Activity**

Have children make a paper crown and decorate it with glitter, gold, etc. Label it “Jesus’ Special Club.” On each point of the crown, stick a star with a characteristic of those who belong to this special club, such as believing in Jesus, keeping the commandments of God. Suggest that they hang it in their room and pray for power to develop those characteristics.

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