

# The Passion Predicted



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Dogs Eat the Crumbs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The World's Greatest Question

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

“They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’

“‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ ”

“Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ.’

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

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

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

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patroni[z]ing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 1996), p. 56.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Discussion Questions:**

❶ **The concept of identity is powerful. Human beings want to belong to something. Unfortunately, there is a natural tendency to deem one’s group, be it racial, national, religious (or any combination thereof) as superior to others. This, of course, can lead to bigotry and even subtle forms of prejudice. The earlier followers of Jesus weren’t immune to this problem. We, no doubt, aren’t either. What can we learn from Jesus that can change this sinful trait, which, unless checked, manifests itself in all of us?**

❷ **Go back and read from Tuesday’s lesson the quote that C. S. Lewis wrote about the identity of Jesus. How, in a parallel manner, could that logic be used in defense of the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White? What claims did she make about herself? What are some of the incredible things she claimed to have seen in vision? Why, then (again using the same kind of logic that Lewis used), would it be “patronizing nonsense” to simply assert things about her like, “Well, she was just a good woman but had no prophetic gift”? Does she not leave us the choice of either accepting her as someone who manifested the gift of prophecy or as a lunatic, a fool, or even worse?**

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

## “Take Me With You!”

Bartolomé Funez Castellón

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

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

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

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

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

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

I joined a small group that the Adventist secretary attended. I was more comfortable there than at the large church. I was learning so much so fast, and I enjoyed it all very much. I met this girl’s father, and he gave me some Bible study guides that I read and filled out. Before long I was attending the regular church services. I joined the seekers’ Bible study class, and in time I was baptized.



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

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



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