

Embracing *the* World



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 13:33; 25:31-46; John 17:15-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 4:14.*

Memory Text: “‘My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. . . . As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.’” (*John 17:15-18, NIV*).

Those who have studied the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church know that it took a while before the church began to understand the immensity of the challenge God had given her. At first, the small band of disappointed Advent believers saw only a very limited task: to encourage fellow Adventists after 1844. Gradually, however, they saw that God had given them a much greater assignment. They sought a wider audience and began to spread their message to Protestant America. In 1874 the horizon widened as the first official missionary left for Europe. By the year 1900 Adventism had gained a small foothold in many parts of the world and was on its way to what it is today: a truly global movement.

Thus the question for us is this: How are we, as Adventist Christians, to relate to the world at large?

The Week at a Glance: What kind of image should we present to the world? How can we be in the world but not of it? What does the universality of Christ's death tell us about the universality of our own mission to the world?

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

Representing the King *(Matt. 13:33, 2 Cor. 5:20).*

What images did Paul use to point out to the church members in Corinth that they are representatives of God?

2 Cor. 2:15-17

2 Cor. 3:1-3

2 Cor. 5:20

Our life should be such that it calls people to a decision, for or against the principles we espouse. For those who reject the Christ we serve, our witness will be an irritant or even a “smell of death” (*2 Cor. 2:16, NIV*). But for those who find Christ through us, we are a “fragrance of life” (*vs. 16, NIV*)!

We are also pictured as ambassadors. Ambassadors are a small but important class of people. They go wherever they are sent to represent their government. Often they must venture into a culture that differs greatly from their own. Their work demands tact and diplomacy, as well as frankness and courage. Their duty is to guard jealously the interests and the reputations of their home country. What a fitting metaphor for those who represent the kingdom of heaven!

What other image is used in the Bible to illustrate the positive influence Christians are expected to have in society? *Matt. 13:33*. And what does it mean?

Leaven is, in general, a symbol for evil influences, carrying infection. In this sense Jesus used it when He spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees (*Mark 8:15 and parallels*). It also is used by analogy as a symbol for a wholesome influence, which spreads out, as well. The working of leaven in dough is not a slow, imperceptible process. At first, it is true, the leaven is *hidden*, and nothing appears to happen, but then the whole mass begins to swell and bubble as fermentation advances.

The moment you identify yourself as a Christian, you are, for better or for worse, representing your Lord. In other words, whether you are *good, bad, or indifferent*, you are still representing the Lord to those around you. You can never be neutral. Think about those whom you are around. What kind of influence are you projecting? Where and how can you improve?

“In the World” but Not “Of the World” (*John 17:15-17*).

For many Christians, the church is like a club—strictly for members! Although they will say that they believe in witness and evangelism and want their church to grow, their deeds and their attitude speak a different language!

How are we to relate to the world? Are we to embrace the world and all that it offers? Are we to shun the world? Or is there another option? See *John 17:15-17*. What principles is Jesus expressing?

If we want to be true followers of Christ, we will have to mix with the people around us. We must not spend all our time in pious meditation, thanking God that we differ from all those *worldly* people around us. The opposite is true. While we must be *holy*—as in being radically different in the way we live—we must not keep our distance from those who must also hear the good news. We are told to “ ‘Go into all the world’ ” (*Mark 16:15, NIV*) and, like Paul, identify with the people with whom we come in contact (*1 Cor. 9:19-23*).

Why did God intervene when, after the Flood, the inhabitants of the world decided to build an enormous fortress that would house them all? *Gen. 11:4, 7*.

The descendants of Noah and his sons did not want to move away from where they lived. They wanted to stay together. If ever there was a group of people with a fortress mentality, we find them in Genesis 11. But God intervened. He did not agree with this fortress mentality then, and He doesn't now.

“Babel plays itself out over and over again in the lives of congregations. A new church is formed with excitement, energy and vision. As the years pass, however, the church functions less to introduce Jesus Christ to nonbelievers than to provide a safe, secure and familiar environment to those who already believe and belong.”—Stephen A. Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 25, 26.

Go back and read again John 17:15-17. How does that apply in your own personal situation? Are you really not “of the world”? If you answer Yes, what justification can you give for that answer? How can one be truly “not of this world”?

“Religion in Overalls” (*Matt. 25:31-46*).

The title of today’s study is borrowed from that of a book by William G. Johnsson in which the author takes a close look at the meaning of the Gospel of Matthew. Johnsson writes:

“In an age that proclaims on its T-shirts, ‘Only Believe’ and ‘I love you!’ . . . Matthew insists that practice balances one’s profession, that faith and love put on overalls and get their hands dirty out where the people are—in jail, in the slums, in the poorhouse, in the charity ward.”—William G. Johnsson, *Religion in Overalls* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1977), p. 22.

What are the following texts telling us about how we are to relate to the world around us?

Matt. 25:31-46

Luke 1:52, 53

The question is not whether followers of Christ should focus on preaching or helping the needy. It is not a matter of either/or but of and/and. Christians share in the universal responsibility of helping fellow human beings who face particular challenges: hunger, thirst, illiteracy, poverty, poor health conditions, imprisonment, discrimination, etc. Christ is our role model. He ministered to all aspects of our human condition—the spiritual, as well as the emotional and the physical. The early church clearly did not forget its social responsibility, and neither should we. Community-service activities, religious-liberty advocacy, educational programs, prison ministries, and ADRA are just a few of the avenues through which we can minister to people.

“Pure and undefiled religion is not a sentiment, but the doing of works of mercy and love.”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 38.

Serving others in these capacities, however, demands self-denial, just as being a Christian does. Only as we learn to surrender and die at the foot of the Cross will we be in a position to minister to others in the same way that Christ did.

What are you doing for the poor, the needy, and the afflicted in your community? If the next time you see some of them and think of Christ’s words, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (*Matt. 25:40*), why wouldn’t it be so easy just to walk away and ignore them?

The Power of Prayer

Intercessory prayer is a reservoir of power that should be tapped to an even larger extent than it is today. Prayer for ourselves, for our own spiritual and material needs, is essential. But prayer for others—for the pastors, literature evangelists and missionaries, the church’s administrators, for the leaders of our countries and, yes, for the world—should rank high on our list of priorities.

If someone were to ask you to compose a 30-second prayer for the world, what would you pray, and why?

Praying for fellow human beings, pleading with God on behalf of others, is a duty and a privilege for every Christian. And, though we can never be sure when and in what manner God will answer our prayers, there is no doubt that they do have effect. The apostle James states it clearly: “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (5:16, NIV).

There are countless examples in Scripture of men and women who prayed for others. Read the following texts: Gen. 20:7; Num. 11:1, 2; 1 Sam. 12:19, 23; 1 Kings 13:6-9; Ps. 122:6; Matt. 5:44; Col. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1. What do they tell us about the need to pray for others?

“Our intercessory prayers express a sense of solidarity with other human beings. We are embedded in the great fabric of humanity. What happens to others inevitably involves us, and what we do affects them, too. Furthermore, God has ways of working in the world that we cannot understand.”—Richard Rice, *The Reign of God*, p. 297.

In your experience, what impact has prayer had in your own life? How has it changed you? How have your prayers, as far as you can tell, impacted others? What evidence, if any, do you have that prayer does make a difference?

The Cross and the World

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus gives us our calling as a church. Notice it is a worldwide calling. We are to go to all nations with the message of salvation found in Jesus Christ. We see this same basic calling, only in a specific end-time context, in the first angel's message (*Rev. 14:6, 7*).

Thus, God's church is to impact the whole world. And that makes perfect sense, because Christ's mission was for the whole world.

Look up these texts. What are they all saying about the universality of what Christ has done at the Cross? *Isa. 53:6, 2 Cor. 5:19, Heb. 2:9, 1 John 2:2, 4:14.*

The point is simple: Christ's death covered every human being who ever lived. It was complete for the whole world. Thus, the whole world needs to know about Jesus and what He has done for them.

"But the atonement for a lost world was to be full, abundant, and complete. Christ's offering was exceedingly abundant to reach every soul that God had created. It could not be restricted so as not to exceed the number who would accept the great Gift. All men are not saved; yet the plan of redemption is not a waste because it does not accomplish all that its liberality has provided for. There must be enough and to spare."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 565, 566.

We can't be true followers of Christ unless we are, in whatever capacity, seeking to let the world know about what Christ has done for it. Thus, we must not flee the world but must engage the world and make a difference by the way we live and interact with people and by the way in which we respond to the needs of fellow human beings, far and near. This, more than any other way, will open people up to hear what we have to say about the God who not only has created all of us but who has paid for all our sins. Even those living in abject ignorance of Christ have had their sins paid for at the Cross, just as much as ours were paid for there. Thus, these people need to know what we know; and how can they ever learn if we—who do know about the Cross—don't tell them? Hence, our mission to the world.

Not everyone, of course, is in a position to minister directly to those in others lands. What, though, can you, either as an individual or through your church, do to have a part in our worldwide calling?

Further Study: “The suffering and destitute of all classes are our neighbors, and when their wants are brought to our knowledge it is our duty to relieve them as far as possible. A principle is brought out in this parable [of the good Samaritan] that it would be well for the followers of Christ to adopt. First meet the temporal necessities of the needy and relieve their physical wants and sufferings, and you will then find an open avenue to the heart.”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 118.

“Every provision has been made for the salvation of the fallen race. All power has been given to Him who offered himself as a sacrifice for the redemption of every son and daughter of Adam. ‘As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Jan. 7, 1902.

Discussion Questions:

1 We are told we are “in the world” and that we must identify with those we want to reach. We must understand how they think and must speak their *language*. How are we able to do this without being impacted in a negative way by some of the negative things they do?

2 However important it is to meet the temporal needs of those in the world, we must also remember that meeting the needs of the world isn’t the end but a means to an end. What is that end? How can we avoid the danger of forgetting what our true purpose here is?

Summary: Though we are “not of the world,” we should be very much “in the world,” making a difference and giving a better taste to society. True Christianity is not just a matter of having correct doctrine or calling people to a faith in God. It also is a ministry to the poor and disenfranchised. In addition, we have the responsibility of praying for others, in the church and out in the world. Christ’s death covered the whole world; our ministry must, then, be just as inclusive.

Searching for Meaning *by NYAMDAAVA*

Nyamdavaa lives in Mongolia. He attended a military school, where he learned that the strongest prevail. He worked hard to strengthen his body and focus his mind.

After completing his training in military school, he joined some friends to start a small business. But his life was not going as he wished. One day he realized that he felt empty, with no sense of purpose or meaning in life. If there were no meaning to life, what was the difference? Why not just die?

Nyamdavaa had read the Christian Bible occasionally, and he sensed that it held the key to meaning in life. He began searching it for answers. An Adventist friend invited Nyamdavaa to church, and he went. There he found meaningful worship and a group of genuinely happy people.

He ended his relationship with his old friends who seemed to want nothing but to have a good time drinking. He no longer wanted to drink and spent much time alone, studying the Bible. His family thought he was crazy, for he spent all his time reading and praying. Often he did not eat; food was not important when he was searching for God.

At one point Nyamdavaa became sick. He was too weak to get out of bed. For two weeks he remained in bed, praying and reading the Bible. His prayer became, "Take my life, God, and use me for Your service. Just use me." He regained his health and was baptized a few months later.

Nyamdavaa was invited to study at the 1000 Missionary Movement in the Philippines. During his three months there, he experienced several miracles of protection and providence. One exercise required him to swim across a river, but Nyamdavaa could not swim. He prayed for God's protection as he jumped into the water. He felt a hand holding him up, and he made it across.

He returned to Mongolia to start a new church in a large city in northern Mongolia. One Friday the apartment building in which he and his roommate lived had no water. On Sabbath the water returned only to their apartment. When his neighbors learned that they had water, they asked the two young men for some. This provided an excellent opportunity to meet their neighbors and share their faith and water with them.

Nyamdavaa and his roommate invited young people to come to their apartment for Bible stories and songs. These children invited more children and their parents. Their group has grown, and in the first year in this city, 45 people were baptized.

NYAMDAAVA continues to work in this city, developing the interests they have found there. He would like to become a trained pastor or Bible worker.

One of the great purposes of the Bible is to show us not only what our ends are but how we can reach those ends. Next quarter's study of the book of Daniel, written by Gerhard Pfandl, fulfills a unique role in helping us do just that. In it are impressive prophecies that, perhaps better than anywhere else in Scripture, help establish a firm and rational foundation for our faith in the One who, through the work of Jesus Christ, has assured us our end: eternal life in a new creation (Isa. 66:22).

Lesson 1: "To Eat or Not to Eat—That Is the Question"

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

SUNDAY: A Tale of Two Cities: Babylon and Jerusalem (*Dan. 1:1*).

MONDAY: The Innocent and the Guilty (*Dan. 1:2-7*).

TUESDAY: Daniel's Determination (*Dan. 1:8*).

WEDNESDAY: The Test (*Dan. 1:9-16*).

THURSDAY: The Reward (*Dan. 1:17-20*).

MEMORY TEXT: *Psalm 119:105*

SABBATH GEMS: What do Babylon and Jerusalem symbolize? What caused the demise of Jerusalem? Why did innocent people have to suffer in the onslaught? Why didn't Daniel eat the king's food?

Lesson 2: Nebuchadnezzar's Image

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

SUNDAY: Nebuchadnezzar's Dilemma (*Dan. 2:1-13*).

MONDAY: Daniel's Prayer Meetings (*Dan. 2:14-23*).

TUESDAY: Daniel's Testimony (*Dan. 2:24-30*).

WEDNESDAY: The Image and Its Interpretation (*Dan. 2:28-45*).

THURSDAY: Daniel's Promotion (*Dan. 2:46*).

MEMORY TEXT: *Daniel 2:21*

SABBATH GEM: Using around one hundred-eighty Hebrew words, Daniel describes the course of history in advance and thereby provides comfort to God's people. This gives us the assurance that when the great empires of the world have run their course, God's kingdom, an everlasting kingdom, will follow and remain forever.

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