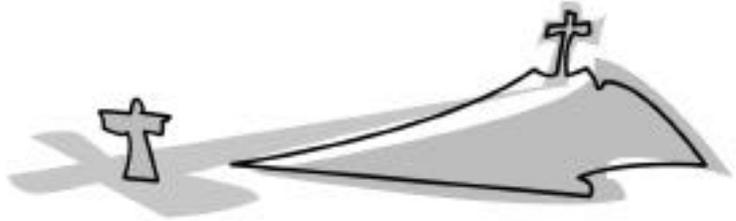


In the Shadow of Calvary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:28-36; 24:7; Acts 10:38, 39; 1 Cor. 15:13-18.*

Memory Text: “John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (*John 1:29, NKJV*).

In *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, a monk heard about a bridge that collapsed and killed five people. He determined to find out why those particular five were killed. Because He believed in an all-powerful God, there had to be a rational explanation. Unfortunately, he took his notes, acquired over years of inquiry, and cast them into the sea. What he found disturbed him immensely—he couldn't find a good reason for their deaths.

Someone might have told Brother Juniper that he would not find *rational* answers. This side of heaven we don't have them. What we have is the Cross—God suffering for the sin, evil, and hurt of this world. Here we find, if not answers to questions about suffering, hope that those answers exist and one day will be revealed.

The Week at a Glance: What was John the Baptist's role in the ministry of Jesus? Why should the Cross be the center of our beliefs? Why did the disciples respond as they did to Christ's warning about the Cross? How do we reflect the same attitude?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 29.*

John the Baptist—Christ’s Forerunner

(*John 1:29-34*).

Though little is given in Scripture about John the Baptist, enough is given to show us his zeal, dedication, faith, and (most important) humanity. We have much to learn from this fiery, uncompromising preacher who heralded the first coming of Christ.

What foundational truth did God reveal to John about Jesus of Nazareth and what Jesus came to do? What do you think John meant by those words (*John 1:29*)?

Although John certainly did not fully grasp the import of his own words designating Jesus as the Lamb of God, he, nonetheless, spoke them under the prompting of the Spirit. His mission was to open the minds and hearts of people to the centrality of Christ’s atoning sacrifice in the plan of salvation. Whatever else Jesus came to do—the healing, the teaching, the preaching, the raising from the dead—it all was to point the people not only to who He was but to what He was going to do for them by His death. Because without that death and what it would accomplish for the world, in the end all His other work would have been in vain.

Look up the following texts. What do they tell us about how crucial the death of Jesus was to the plan of salvation? *Mark 8:31, Luke 24:7, 1 Cor. 15:13-18.*

“The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary, and in connection with the wondrous, central truth of the Saviour’s atonement. Those who study the Redeemer’s wonderful sacrifice grow in grace and knowledge.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 221.

Why must the Cross and Christ’s atonement at the Cross be central to our message as Seventh-day Adventists? What can we do as a church to make sure that we keep this great truth at the center? What will happen to us if we ever lose this focus?

Key Text: *Mark 8:31.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To open our minds to the centrality of Christ's atoning sacrifice to the plan of salvation.
2. To invite us to ponder Jesus' life of service, suffering, and sacrifice.
3. To point us to the promise of the Cross—eternal life in the new kingdom.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Cross—a Shadow of Salvation (*John 1:29*).

- A. John seeks to open our minds and our hearts to the Messiah's identity and mission.
- B. Jesus' atoning sacrifice is central to our salvation.
- C. All human need is addressed and answered in the hope offered by Jesus' death on the cross.

II. Jesus Was God Come Down to Earth (*Acts 10:38, 39*).

- A. The Son of God served untiringly for fallen humanity.
- B. Even though He went about "doing good" (*vs. 38*), He was "hanged on a tree" (*vs. 39*).
- C. We are invited to join Peter in confessing Jesus as our Messiah.

III. The Cross Precedes the Crown (*Heb. 12:1-5*).

- A. The disciples were so focused on earthly issues they could not understand Jesus' impending sacrifice.
- B. The Transfiguration should have given the disciples faith for the coming trial.
- C. We must look to the Cross as the answer to our human need, as our only hope of a heavenly kingdom.

Summary: Jesus came to earth as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. He lived a life of service, suffering, and sacrifice, providing the only remedy for sin. We are invited daily to contemplate the themes of the Cross so we might be strengthened in our understanding of the gift of salvation. In our Savior's power, we, too, can go into our world to serve and share the plans of rescue for all humanity.

COMMENTARY

In the Shadow of Calvary.

Introduction. Jesus was gripped by His mission to seek and save the lost. Everything He did was impelled by that all-consuming aim. Clearly conscious that His work on earth would culminate on Calvary, He steadily moved toward that goal without flinching or

Christ's Life of Service, Suffering, and Sacrifice (*Acts 10:38, 39*).

For about three and a half years, the Son of God toiled laboriously among fallen humanity. The Gospels are filled with account after account of the good deeds that Jesus accomplished through the power of God working through His humanity. Never did the world see such a Healer, such a Teacher, such a Lover of people! His life, from His earliest days, was dedicated to the service of fellow human beings.

Describe Christ's work and its effect. *Matt. 4:23-25; 8:14-17; Acts 10:38, 39.*

If you read Acts 10:38, 39, you can see the most incredible paradox: Jesus goes around "doing good," and what does He get for His effort but "hanged on a tree"? How could this happen? Why would someone, whose kindness, goodness, purity, and love were apparent to everyone, elicit such a negative, hateful reaction? Unless, of course, it was precisely His purity, love, and goodness that caused such a reaction.

Read John 3:19-21, 15:17-25, and Romans 8:7. How do they help answer the questions posed in the above paragraph?

Lest we be so quick to judge and condemn, we ought to look at our own wicked hearts (*Jer. 17:9*). Who among us, when confronted by someone whose lifestyle or kindness or love or faith or generosity or benevolence are contrasted to our weaknesses in any (or all) of these areas, has not felt twinges of guilt, resentment, even hatred? And if we would feel this way when contrasted with another sinner, imagine what we might feel when placed in the company of Jesus.

Why do we sometimes feel anger, resentment, or guilt when placed around such people? What should those thoughts tell us about ourselves? What kind of warning signals are they? What's the only remedy?

morbid feelings or reckless abandon but sustained by His Father's love and grace and His longing for our redemption.

I. John the Baptist—Christ's Forerunner.

John's teachings were a mirror of Christ's own. (*Compare Matt. 3:2 with 4:17; 3:6-12 with 7:13-23; John 3:11-21 with 3:27-35.*) John's teachings epitomized the message of all the Lord's former prophets, with the additional emphasis of a focused identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He intuitively grasped the sacrificial nature of Christ's mission.

Untainted by rabbinic traditions, rooted in Scripture, and filled with the Holy Spirit, John was heaven's agent for calling Israel to repentance and preparation of heart for the Messiah. Spiritually receptive people from all walks of life responded to his call with great intensity of conviction (*see Luke 3 and Matthew 3*). His uncompromising message of truth, calling men and women to repentance and holiness, led to John's death at the hands of truth-hating rulers. This foreshadowed the fate of his Master.

II. Christ's Life of Service, Suffering, and Sacrifice.

If all the merciful deeds of Christ performed even in His few earthly years were woven into a pictorial tapestry, the richly illustrated fabric resulting would wrap itself around the world many times. Jesus did not perform His work in a laborious, lamenting manner but with kindness, courtesy, and good cheer. He was scorned not because of His works of compassion but because of the light of heaven's purity that permeated His manners and instruction. On the whole, the masses that thronged about Him had a far greater craving for relief from physical suffering and political oppression than they did for release from the bondage of sin and ignorance (*see John 6, whole chapter*). His aim went much further than the alleviation of human suffering; He wished to transmute the dark and dingy hearts of humanity into temples for the indwelling of His kingdom. His greatest joy was to see souls respond to the heavenly invitation; His greatest grief was to see people turn away from that invitation with sullen disappointment that their selfish expectations were not met by His service and holy aims. Not desiring the fullness of His life, they went away as empty as they came.

"We must ask ourselves the question, Does Christ dwell in my heart by faith? He alone can show us our necessity and reveal the dignity and glory of the truth. At the altar of self-sacrifice—the appointed place of meeting between God and the soul—we receive from the hand of God the celestial torch which searches the heart, revealing its great need of an abiding Christ."—Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 21.

Warnings of the Cross

At what point in His ministry did Christ begin to make increasing references to His destined crucifixion? Why do you think He waited until this time? *Matt. 16:13-21, Luke 9:18-22.*

Many Bible scholars believe that it was in the summer before His crucifixion (August or September, A.D. 30) that Christ received Peter's great confession of His Messiahship at Caesarea-Philippi. (*See The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 231.) From that point on, Jesus wished to dispel the apostles' false concepts of His essential mission and brace them for His rapidly approaching ordeal and the attendant trials that they would bear for His sake.

Why was it so difficult for the disciples to accept or even understand Christ's explicit references to His impending sacrifice? *Mark 9:31, 32; Luke 9:44, 45.*

In both accounts, Mark and Luke say that the disciples feared to ask Jesus what He meant; that is, they didn't want to know. How human a character trait: not wanting to hear bad news, not wanting to hear something that would go against our own cherished notions and hopes.

In many ways, we can find the key to this attitude in Mark's account, a few verses later (*vss. 33, 34*), when they had been disputing among themselves who would be the greatest. In other words, those who were busy thinking about worldly honors weren't really ready for the shame and degradation of the Cross. No wonder Mark twice refers to the dullness of the disciples' comprehension of Christ's words and deeds, because their "hearts were hardened" (*Mark 6:52, NRSV; 8:17*). This hardening was from the deceitfulness of pride and vainglory that conflicted with the spirit of the Cross. His disciples, at this stage, viewed self-sacrificing love as a rare medallion to adorn the mantle of life's majestic moments, rather than as the proper spirit of everyday life. When they saw Christ turn aside in self-abnegation from opportunities to seize the reins of political power, they were offended by His apparent lack of gritty pragmatism and ambition.

How, even in our local church or even in our own heart, do we see this same spirit manifested? It's only natural to want honor and glory, is it not? In what ways do you see it in yourself? Why, then, must we be broken at the foot of the cross?

III. Warnings of the Cross.

It is noteworthy that only toward the end of His earthly days did Christ increasingly emphasize to His disciples His impending sacrifice. This was not to elicit their pity or seek their advice but to strengthen them to meet the crisis and to overcome the vain, selfish ambitions that cumbered their way, beclouded their spiritual perceptions, and stunted their fellowship with Him. Christ longed for His disciples to see that the plan of salvation was rooted not in the

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *John 1:29-34; 15:11; Acts 10:38, 39; Heb. 12:1-5.*

① No matter what your academic career may have included, some classes stand out as more useful than others. What was your favorite subject? What practical applications has it had in your daily life? In *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 221, Ellen White says, “Those who study the Redeemer’s wonderful sacrifice grow in grace and knowledge.” How can an understanding of the Cross bless your life? How might you share this good news with someone else?

② Joy is a very personal experience. Some would describe it through the use of sight or sound; others through the sharing of a memory. In John 15:11, Jesus talks about obtaining a joy that is “complete.” How does the joy Jesus offers transcend any sight, sound, taste, touch, or memory we might have? How might you share your joy in Jesus with a neighbor or friend?

③ Jesus went about “doing good,” and yet, He was “hanged on a tree” (*Acts 10:38, 39*). His disciples were warned about His impending death on the cross, but they were too busy with earthly business to understand. What keeps us from comprehending Jesus’ atoning sacrifice? How can we live our lives following Jesus’ pattern of service and sacrifice?

④ When we have a difficult job to do, we often persevere by focusing on the rewards of a positive outcome. Hebrews 12:1-5 (*NIV*) talks about things that “hinder” or “entangle” our spiritual journeys. How does “looking unto Jesus” (*Heb. 12:2*) strengthen us during trying times?

⑤ What is the most spectacular thing you ever have seen? What made it so memorable? Jesus revealed Himself as God to the disciples at the Transfiguration. How does this glimpse into heaven help you anticipate a future glory?

Falling Shadows and Radiant Glory

Read Matthew 17:1-9, Luke 9:28-36. Write down what things happened that should have increased the faith of those who witnessed this incredible divine manifestation.

Christ knew that His disciples were altogether unprepared for the impending crisis. Burdened with the mounting opposition of the religious leaders, with John the Baptist's recent beheading, and with Christ's warning of His own imminent sufferings, they faced a certain foreboding. Hence, this incredible manifestation of divine power, including a voice from heaven affirming Jesus before the disciples. All this certainly should have increased their faith and strengthened them for the coming trials.

What did Moses and Elijah talk about with Christ? *Luke 9:30, 31.* Why do you think they discussed this topic?

It is fascinating that Heaven did not send mighty angels to the Savior at this time; instead, two human beings who themselves, in their own way, suffered the toils and trials of humanity came to talk with the Savior about His impending sacrifice on the cross. In other words, this incredible scene wasn't just for these three disciples (who slept through part of the whole thing, anyway) but for Jesus, to strengthen Him in His humanity as He faced the Cross. "These men, chosen above every angel around the throne, had come to commune with Jesus concerning the scenes of His suffering, and to comfort Him with the assurance of the sympathy of heaven."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 425.

Imagine yourself having the privilege of some incredible divine manifestation of heavenly power that strongly affirmed your faith in Jesus, just as what Peter, James, and John had here. You would never doubt again, right? Your faith would remain solid, right? You'd never need any other affirmation, right? Why was this not the experience of the disciples, even after the Transfiguration? What was their problem, and what is ours?

performance of miraculous deeds or in the manifestation of overpowering personal force but in self-sacrificing love interfused with the divine wisdom of regenerative grace.

IV. Falling Shadows and Radiant Glory.

Christ's visible glory on the Mount of Transfiguration and the Father's audible proclamation " 'This is My beloved Son . . . Hear Him!' " (*Matt. 17:5, NKJV*) were designed to strengthen the disciples' faith in Jesus' identity, mission, and teachings. Had the disciples more carefully listened to the words of Moses and Elijah as they spoke with Christ of "His decease" [*exodus*, in Greek], which He should accomplish [*pleroo* in Greek, i.e., perfect, finish, make full] at Jerusalem, then they would not have been thrown off balance by Calvary and the events leading up to it. The Passion Week would still have been filled with immeasurably poignant pathos for them; how-

Witnessing

We all have heard the saying, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." Thank God we have the perfect life of Christ to imitate.

Jesus was a teacher. He exercised untiring efforts to educate the hearts and minds of all those with whom He came in contact. Those of us who are teachers witness and minister to those around us at any given moment, on any given day of the week.

Some of us emulate the principles of Christ's life by serving as physicians, nurses, or other health-care professionals. Daily following Jesus' example, we bend to the seemingly endless task of attempting to alleviate humanity's pain and suffering—all brought on as a direct result of living in a sin-sick world.

There are those who have answered God's call to the ministry. We help make available to others God's plan of salvation, to be used as the all-enveloping shield against Satan and his hordes.

We are builders, farmers, business professionals, hairdressers, politicians, shopkeepers. No matter our earthly profession, we have set our goal on eternal life. Not only for ourselves but for all others. Not only with those with whom we work, ride the bus, or see in meetings. We are instructed by Christ to seek out all those who are lost so they may learn of the precious plan of salvation. That means we actively must reach out to strangers through the personal examples we set, through small tract distribution, invitations to evangelistic events, Sabbath School, or NET events. Maybe witnessing through prison ministries, drama, or volunteering in abuse shelters are means you prefer. Whatever milieu is right for you, even if you first have to push, prod, or literally force yourself, the important thing is that you *get out there!*

Thank You, Jesus, for Your perfect example, ever guiding us toward heaven.

Law of the New Kingdom *(Matt. 20:25-28).*

Christ's ministry was moving toward its climax. He was leading His disciples on their last journey together. On the way, He told them plainly that at Jerusalem "all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished," for "the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again" (*Luke 18:31, NKJV; Matt. 20:18, 19, NKJV*). This statement of coming events should have turned the disciples' interest to the teachings of the prophets concerning these matters. But "they understood none of these things; . . . and they did not know the things which were spoken" (*Luke 18:34, NKJV*), not because Jesus' words were unclear or enigmatic but because His purposes were so foreign to their aims and expectations. They simply didn't want to hear what He had to say. Christ had, after all, commissioned them to proclaim everywhere that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (*Matt. 3:2, NKJV*) and promised that they would be given positions of high honor in it, enthroned as judges of Israel (*Matt. 19:27-30*).

Stimulated by this promise, James and John, with their mother, Salome, asked Jesus for what special favor? What did His reply reveal about the path to the throne of glory in His kingdom and the nature of His government? *Matt. 20:20-28, Mark 10:35-45.*

This request smacked heavily of self-serving ambition, but Jesus did not rebuke them or their mother for coveting personal honors that were so incongruous with His character and mission. Rather, He sought to deepen and purify their love for Him and their attachment to His cause. He wished them to see that the cross precedes the crown.

Fyodor Dostoyevski once wrote a story about Jesus coming to earth in the flesh, as He had come the first time. Before long, Jesus was arrested and thrown into jail, where He faced interrogation by the Grand Inquisitor, who wanted to know why Jesus came back and interfered with them and their plans. Now suppose Jesus were, in the flesh, to step directly into your life. In what ways would He be interfering with you and your plans? What does your answer tell you about yourself and how you are living?

ever, the events of that Passover culminating on Calvary would not have shattered their faith, as it did temporarily, but solemnly confirmed it. For them, the Cross would have been invested from the very outset with power, victory, and grace instead of weakness, failure, and shame. But we must remember that Christ's resurrection and reappearance among them after the third day banished their earlier misconceptions and doubts.

V. Law of the New Kingdom.

“Jesus bears tenderly with [James and John], not rebuking their selfishness in seeking preference above their brethren. He reads their hearts, He knows the depth of their attachment to Him. Their love is not a mere human affection; though defiled by the earthliness of its human channel, it is an outflowing from the fountain of His own redeeming love. He will not rebuke, but deepen and purify. . . . They would count it highest honor to prove their loyalty by sharing all that is to befall their Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 548.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Have you ever had to change your mind about someone? What was that like?

Verses for Group Focus: *Mark 9:30-37.*

Thought Questions:

- ❶ Considering Mark 9:30-37 as a whole, what might be some of the reasons why the disciples were unable to understand what Jesus was telling them about His death and resurrection?
- ❷ How might Jesus' words about servanthood and welcoming children (*vss. 35-37*) relate to the place where the disciples were in their spiritual growth?

Application Questions:

- ❶ What parallels might there be between this passage and areas of growth in our own lives? How might Jesus' words about servanthood and welcoming children (*vss. 35-37*) relate to the place where you are in your spiritual growth?
- ❷ The disciples were being typical humans in their argument over which one of them was the greatest (*vs. 34*). How does today's world define greatness? Who among them really was the greatest, and what defined that person's greatness? (*vss. 35-37*).

Further Study: See Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 359, 541–543; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 547–551, 644; *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 142; *The Sanctified Life*, pp. 56, 57; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 226.

“The cross of Calvary is to be lifted high above the people, absorbing their minds and concentrating their thoughts. Then all the spiritual faculties will be charged with divine power direct from God. Then there will be a concentration of the energies in genuine work for the Master. The workers will send forth to the world beams of light, as living agencies to enlighten the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 44.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Christ, the world’s best Teacher and Model of truth, consistently demonstrated, in every act, that He came “not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (*Mark 10:45*). Why did His disciples have such difficulty grasping His sacrificial, self-transcending mission and calling for their lives? What does this say about humanity in its fallen state? How only can this spirit be changed?
- 2 If Christ had grumbled about humanity’s lack of appreciation for His services and complained about His disciples’ unperceptiveness with regard to His essential aims and character, how would that have affected His influence and mission? Do we have any more right to grumble and complain than Christ had? What is the antidote to this all-too-common spirit and behavior? *John 15:11, 16:33, Heb. 12:1-5*.
- 3 The disciples, followers of Christ, were unprepared for the Cross, despite being given much light beforehand about it. What parallels can you find between them and their spiritual state and ours as a people and a church as we await the Second Coming?
- 4 Discuss the question at the end of Thursday’s section, though in the context of the church, as a whole, or in your local church setting. Would we welcome Jesus, or would He get in the way of our plans as a church?