

Mission *and* Commission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matt. 25:31–46; Mark 16:14–20; Luke 24:36–53; John 3:14–19; Rom. 5:6–10; 1 Cor. 5:7; 15:3, 4; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:22–25.*

Memory Text: “And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (*Luke 24:46*).

As Adventists, we understand much of our role in the *Great Commission* to be linked to the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. At the center of these messages is the *everlasting gospel*. We have nothing to give to the world unless we give them, above anything and everything else, the great truth of justification by faith alone.

“Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity.’”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890. Thus, for Ellen G. White, central to our mission is the proclamation of justification by faith alone, the great news that salvation comes only through the grace of God poured out upon undeserving sinners and not through any works on our part.

This week we will look at the gospel in the context of the Great Commission.

The Week at a Glance: What role do works of charity have in the life of those who are disciples? What role did Jesus give to the Scriptures in explaining His life and death? How central is the gospel in the Great Commission that Jesus gave to His church?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 22.

End-Time Drama and Discipleship

Read Matthew 25:31–46. This passage is part of Jesus’ Olivet discourse given during His final week of Judean ministry. It is part of the last words of His final pre-Passion discussion.

How are we to understand these words in Matthew 25:31–46, especially in the area of discipleship and witness?

This passage conveys a truth about the mission of disciples. Jesus clearly indicates that part of the work of disciples involves mission to the poor, the sick and suffering, the imprisoned; thus, to all the needy. The ultimate manifestation of discipleship is revealed in how we treat those around us who are in need.

“Thus Christ on the Mount of Olives pictured to His disciples the scene of the great judgment day. And He represented its decision as turning upon one point. When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering. In that day Christ does not present before men the great work He has done for them in giving His life for their redemption. He presents the faithful work they have done for Him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 637.

The Bible does make it clear, in numerous places, that salvation is not earned by our works but comes solely by God’s grace. How, then, are we to understand what Jesus is saying? As you seek to answer this question, keep in mind the idea of who a true disciple is: someone who has surrendered himself/herself totally and completely to Jesus, claiming for themselves “the great work He [Jesus] has done for them in giving His life for their redemption.” How does keeping this important truth before us help us better understand what Jesus is saying? After all, who of us could feed enough poor people, or clothe enough naked people, to earn redemption?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Mark 16:14–20*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Explain why justification by faith is the core of the Great Commission.

Feel: Nourish a desire to be rooted firmly in the gospel.

Do: Live the gospel we are called to preach.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Great Commission and the Gospel

A List Jesus' instructions and promises to the disciples in the Great Commission.

B What does the Great Commission call us to do? How does the call to preach the gospel lie at the foundation of the gospel commission?

C Jesus appeared to the disciples and “upbraided” them for their disbelief in His resurrection. The word comes across tougher in the Greek, meaning “reproached,” “denounced,” or even “insulted.” Why did He need to deal first with their hardheartedness before commissioning them?

D What definition does Jesus give of *gospel* in the Great Commission?

II. Feel: Rooted in the Gospel

A What part does one's own Christian experience play in one's ability to spread the gospel?

B Can you spread the gospel without having fully experienced it yourself?

III. Do: Living the Gospel

A Reread the Key Text. Now ask: “What role can we play in the fulfillment of these words?”

B The disciples had trouble believing in Jesus' resurrection. Do we also deny He is alive by the way we live? What obstacles must we ask God to remove from our hearts?

▶ **Summary:** We should make every effort to make the Great Commission our own through prayer, action, and study.

The Commissioning in Mark

In an earlier lesson, we looked at the Great Commission as presented in Matthew 28:18–20. Read those texts again; review the highlights, particularly the commands and the promises. Ask yourself, when done: “What role am I playing in the fulfillment of these words?”

Read Mark 16:14–20 and compare it with Matthew 28:18–20. What elements are found in one and not the other?

After you have noted the differences, read both accounts again. There is an unmistakable harmony between them. The basic message is the same.

What is Jesus’ message to us, as found in both these accounts?

In both accounts we are told that there was some doubt (*Matt. 28:17*), some hardness of heart, on the part of the disciples. In Mark’s account, Jesus *upbraided* them for this doubt, even though the Greek verb there can be translated into stronger language, such as “reproached,” “denounced,” or even “insulted.” The point was that even after all this time, even after all these things, some among them still struggled with faith. Jesus had to deal firmly with them.

Notice, too, that only after Jesus dealt with their hardness of heart did He give them their commission. Jesus knew that for them to succeed they needed to be strong in faith. His physical presence would soon be gone from them, for He was to be “received up into heaven” (*Mark 16:19*). Anything they were to do for Him from then on would have to be done by faith alone.

Though faith is a gift, it is a gift that needs to be cultivated. What things can you do on a daily basis to nurture, protect, and strengthen your faith?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

One of the ways in which Christianity differs from some of the other world religions is the explicit demand to make converts. Christians do not say, “Your religion is fine—just different than mine.” We want all people not just to know about Jesus but to accept Him as Lord and Savior.

Every member of your class knows someone with whom they ought to be carrying out the gospel commission—someone to whom they ought to be bringing the good news. Suggest to your class that they picture in their minds people in these categories:

- A neighbor on your street or in your building
- Your own child or spouse
- A relative
- A coworker
- Someone with whom you trade or do business
- A friend

Consider This: If any of these people haven’t heard the good news clearly from you, it is possible that they are your assignment in fulfilling the gospel commission. Fortunately, you are not left to do it alone.

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Bible Commentary

I. End-Time Drama and Discipleship (*Read Matthew 25:31–46.*)

Two questions about this passage are answered by analysis in the original Greek language. First, who are the “nations” (*ethne*) gathered before Him? The word can mean either kingdoms themselves or the citizens of all nations, but the tense of the pronoun “them” (*vs.* 32) indicates a judgment

CONTINUED 

Discipleship and the Gospel

Let us look at something else in Mark’s account of the Great Commission. In Mark 16:15, 16, Jesus says, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Thus, we see that at the foundation of the commission is the call to preach the gospel.

With that in mind, read Revelation 14:6. How do these verses help us understand what our work is, not just as disciples but as Seventh-day Adventist disciples?

With the work of preaching the gospel so central to discipleship and with the making of disciples, how crucial that we understand what the *gospel* message really is. Jesus, however, right there in those verses in Mark, pretty much gives us the *gospel*. Believe it, and you shall be saved; reject it, and you shall be lost.

Compare what Jesus said in Mark with John 3:14–19. How does what John writes help us to understand what Jesus is saying in Mark?

How crucial that as disciples we be rooted firmly in the gospel that we are called to preach. Because of sin, the world stood condemned; Jesus bore that condemnation, fully and completely, in Himself. Through this wonderful provision, anyone who believes in Him no longer has to face the condemnation that came through sin; instead, thanks to God’s unfathomable grace, that person—regardless of how sinful his or her past has been—is pardoned, forgiven, and clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. This message must be at the foundation of all that we preach and teach to the world.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

of individuals as opposed to political entities or their rulers.

Second, who are “my brothers and sisters” (*adelphoi*) to whom a response should be made? Anyone in need, or Christian workers, as in Matthew 10:40–42? The word *adelphoi* is applied in Matthew 7:3–5 to any person; so here, too, context suggests that aid be distributed uncritically, whether or not the needy one is a believer.

II. The Commissioning in Mark (Read Mark 16:14–20.)

Mark was the first of the Gospels to be written down. The earliest and most reliable Greek manuscripts of Mark end the Epistle abruptly at verse 8, dropping verses 9–20 entirely. Some scholars feel that the last part was a later addition. (If so, this would mitigate some of the problems associated with verse 18, in particular, a text that has been the cause of some unusual religious practices.)


III. Discipleship and the Gospel

The word *gospel* means, basically, good news. It’s the good news that Jesus has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. It means that the penalty for our sins has been paid in full. It means that no matter our past, we can stand perfect before God right now. It means that God will forgive us anything that we have ever done wrong, no matter what. It means that we can have a whole new start in God. It means that the perfect life of Jesus is now credited to us, as if we, ourselves, lived as sinlessly as did Christ. It means that we now can be connected with the Lord, who will give us the power to live a life of faith and obedience. It means that we are no longer cut off from God and aliens from His eternal kingdom. It means that we are now the “children of God.” It means that we are now part of His heavenly family.

Is it any wonder it is called “good news”?

What else does the “good news” entail? Write down a whole list of other things that it means.

Consider This: Sometimes congregations become judgmental and demanding in their message. Some talk more about what we are failing

CONTINUED 

The Commissioning in Luke

Read Luke 24:36–53, another account of Jesus appearing to His disciples and giving them the call to preach to the world.

In this account, as the disciples gathered, the two disciples who met the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus joined them and shared their encounter. During their discussion, Jesus joined them.

Read this account. What were the first two things that Jesus did to help increase the faith of the disciples?

Notice, however, that Jesus did not stop with just giving them physical evidence, evidence that they could see and feel. No, that was only part of it. He then took them into the Scriptures, showing them from the Word of God that what had happened to Him had been predicted.

What lesson should Christ's use of the Scriptures here teach us?

We see an important principle here: Sure, experiences, physical manifestations, and miracles all have their role and can have a major part in giving people what they need in order to have faith in Jesus. At the same time, however, Scripture must be the foundation of all of our faith. Despite the miracles, Jesus affirmed their faith, using the Scriptures to do it. He used the Scriptures to confirm all that had happened to Him and buttress all that He had said to them. *If Jesus Himself used the Scriptures to justify all that He did, how much more so should we?*

Christ's words and actions here are a stinging, powerful rebuke against any and all attempts to weaken the crucial and foundational role of the Bible in the life of the church and in our work as disciples.

There are so many forces, even within the church, that work to weaken our trust in the Bible. What are some of these forces, and how can we protect ourselves from anything that calls into question the authority of the Scriptures?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

to do than what God has already done, causing people to lose hope. How much of what happens in your congregation is really good news to people?

IV. The Commissioning in Luke

The similarity between this commissioning and Matthew’s is the promise of Divine presence. In Matthew, after giving an evangelistic plan (make disciples, baptize, and teach), Jesus says, “ ‘Lo, I am with you always, even to the very end of the age’ ” (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*). The parallel in Luke 24 is verse 49: “ ‘I am going to send you what my Father has promised,’ ” namely, “ ‘power from on high’ ” (*NIV*).

Consider This: How does Mark’s description of divine power for witnessing (*1:14–20*) differ from these?

“Witnesses of These Things”

• *None of us has witnessed firsthand the events that the disciples did, from whence they derived such evangelistic power. From what in your life do you draw power to witness to others?* (See Mark 5:19.)

► **STEP 3—Practice!**

Hymns About the Good News

This lesson revolves around an understanding of the blessings and respon-

CONTINUED ►

“Witnesses of These Things”

Yesterday, in looking at the Great Commission as presented in Luke, we saw the primacy that Jesus gave to the Scriptures, that He used them to justify all that had happened. He also used the Scriptures to give the disciples their commission to the world.

According to Jesus, what was the message of the Scriptures that the disciples were to take to the world? *See Luke 24:45–48.* How does this fit in with what we looked at in Tuesday’s lesson? How does this fit in with our understanding of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14?

Here again, central to the whole call to make disciples is the death and resurrection of Jesus, all for the *remission of sins*. Jesus Himself points not just to the events that surrounded His life and death but to the meaning of those events. This is what Jesus told them to preach to the world. What would make their testimony so powerful, too, was that He said to them, “ye are witnesses of these things” (*Luke 24:48*); that is, the things surrounding His death and resurrection.

How do the following texts help us to understand the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection? *Rom. 5:6–10; 1 Cor. 5:7; 15:3, 4; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:22–25.*

The disciples apparently were powerful witnesses, too. What began in Jerusalem as primarily a Jewish affair became a worldwide movement within 50 years. Acts 1–7 show the growth in Jerusalem and Judea; chapters 8–12 show how persecution and other influences took the movement beyond to Samaria, Ethiopia, Syria, and other Gentile territories. Acts 13–28 show how Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor turned Christian, took it in ever-widening circles until it reached Rome.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

sibilities of the gospel. Hymns are a marvelous place to find powerful expressions of the gospel. Lead your class in singing and analyzing a few hymns about good news. (One verse of each hymn should be sufficient.) What good news item is highlighted in each?

- No. 300 — “Rock of Ages” (God’s forgiveness)
- No. 159 — “The Old Rugged Cross” (Christ’s death for us)
- No. 526 — “Because He Lives” (Christ’s resurrection)
- No. 363 — “Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service” (mercy)
- No. 358 — “Far and Near the Fields are Teeming” (sharing the good news)
- No. 213 — “Lift Up the Trumpet” (Second Coming)
- No. 206 — “Face to Face” (resurrection and heaven)
- No. 223 — “Crown Him With Many Crowns” (Jesus’ eternal reign)

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

Most of us are stopped in our desire to witness to the good news by several considerations:

“I don’t know what to say.”

It is not intellectual knowledge of the Scriptures that qualifies you to witness. Jesus qualified evangelists not because of how much they knew but because of what they had seen and experienced of God’s power in their own lives.

“I don’t want to be a pest.”

People are understandably resistant to head-on challenges to their religious beliefs. Yet, almost no one will reject you should you bring them unalloyed good news—e.g., God is with you, He loves you, will solve your problems, and death is not the end. After telling someone such good news, it may seem natural to invite him or her into a community (your church) that is permeated with good news.

“Why should they listen to me?”

There is only one reason: that they see something in you that they want to have in their own lives. As Jesus said to one man, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (*Mark 5:19, NIV*).

Further Study: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 553–560, 658–660, 881–887, 1110; Ellen G. White, “The Lord Is Risen,” pp. 779–787; “Why Weepst Thou,” pp. 788–794; “The Walk to Emmaus,” pp. 795–801; “Peace Be Unto You,” pp. 802–808; “By the Sea Once More,” pp. 809–817; “Go Teach the Nations,” pp. 818–828, in *The Desire of Ages*; “God’s Purpose for His Church,” pp. 9–16; “The Training of the Twelve,” pp. 17–24; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; “Pentecost,” pp. 35–46; “The Gift of the Spirit,” pp. 47–56, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 21, Acts 1, 2.

“Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 19, 20.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do we understand Mark 16:16? Is Jesus saying that you have to be baptized to be saved? In what ways does the text itself supply the answer? What is our understanding, as a church, of the meaning and importance of baptism?
- 2 Think about your local church and how it fits in with the worldwide mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as given to us in the texts for this week. What role does your church have? What part is it playing? How can you, working through even your Sabbath School class, help get your church more involved in the work of spreading the gospel to all nations?
- 3 Why is it so important for us, as disciples, to understand the gospel before we can be effective witnesses for Jesus? What is your understanding of the gospel? Write it out in a single paragraph. Bring it to class and be prepared to share it with others there. What insights can you gain from the above Ellen G. White quote?
- 4 What more can your local church do to help the poor and the needy in your area? What kind of commitment does your church have to this important aspect of being a disciple?