

# The Son of God Among Us



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Matthew 23; Mark 9:12; Luke 24:7; John 1:1–14, 29; Heb. 2:9.*

**Memory Text:** “The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ, the Word of life” (1 John 1:1, NLT).

**Key Thought:** Nobody else in history has had such a huge impact on the world or such a divided opinion as much as Jesus. The future of each of our lives comes down to one crucial question Jesus Himself asked: “Who do you say I am?” (*Matt. 16:15, NIV*).

Some people today dispute whether Jesus ever lived, but the historical evidence is overwhelmingly clear. The real issue concerns His identity and purpose. Was He just a good man or God’s Son? “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 the 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.”—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960), p. 52.

As Adventists, we work from the starting point that the Bible is the Word of God and that what it says about Jesus is the truth, period. We do not have the time to waste on nonsensical high-critical speculations about whether Jesus did the things the Bible says that He did.

After all, if we cannot believe the Bible, what can we believe?

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 26.*

## Who Was Jesus? Part 1

Over the centuries, people have argued about Jesus, sung about Him, written about Him, preached about Him, cursed Him, made movies about Him, even died for Him; but most people in the world today either do not know Him or know only what He has accomplished in their behalf.

**If** someone were to ask you, **Who was Jesus? what would you say, and why?**

Your answer, whatever it contained, should have dealt with the fact that Jesus was the divine Son of God and that He died for our sins and rose again. That He did great things while here is fine; that He preached powerful sermons is fine; that He revealed to us the character of God is fine. But none of these things, in the end, really matter if Jesus did not come and die as the Substitute for us, thus giving each of us the promise of eternal life (if we but claim it for ourselves).

**Why** is the death of Jesus, and what it accomplished, so crucial in helping us understand who Jesus was? *Mark 9:12, Luke 24:7, John 1:29, Rom. 5:15–21, Heb. 2:9.*

There have through history been many great men and women who have accomplished marvelous things, things that on the surface seemed even more impressive than what Jesus of Nazareth had accomplished. After all, He was an “unofficial” rabbi from a relatively small and insignificant province of Rome who died an early death and left just a handful of fearful and demoralized followers. On the other hand, when we grasp who Jesus was and just what He did while here, we realize that nothing that any other human being could have done is even worth comparing with Him. In fact, in the end, without Jesus and what He did for us, anything that anyone ever accomplished in this world would, in the large scheme of things, ultimately come to nothing. Because without Jesus and His death, the whole world and everything in it would come to nothing.

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 John 1:1*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Have the absolute assurance that what is said about Jesus in the Bible is true and accurate.

**Feel:** An admiration and attachment to Jesus as the only Savior of humanity and as a true Hero to be emulated.

**Do:** Make a list of ways in which you feel you are “imitating” Jesus and compare it to what we learned in this week’s lesson.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. A well-known European theologian made the following statement. Discuss this statement in your class. What are its implications? “Our system [calendar dating] does not proceed from an indicial point, but from a center. . . . It takes as the mid-point an event that is open to historical investigation and can be chronologically fixed. . . . This event is the birth of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” John 1:1–14.—Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time, The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964) p. 17.

II. How do you explain the titles of Wednesday’s and Thursday’s lessons, “Exposing the Hypocrites” and “Love for the Hypocrites”? What does that have to do with a lesson about Jesus? *Matthew 23:13, 23:37*.

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III. How do you explain Ellen White’s statement in Friday’s lesson, “We may do much in a short time”?

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► **Summary:** Even the most commonly used secular calendar systems divide time by the birth of Jesus. His ministry and plan of salvation are the only true hope of humanity.

## Who Was Jesus? Part 2

What made Jesus unique in human history? It certainly was not a powerful public relations and marketing team. He did not have one. It certainly was not His wealth. He did not have any, at least not as the world understands wealth. And He did not have any political power to speak of either. On the contrary, He had been essentially on the margins of political power.

Jesus did have power, but it was a selfless power. He healed diseases, restored broken lives, and left pious hypocrites speechless. He once said to His disciples, “ ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all’ ” (*Mark 10:42–44, NIV*). Not exactly a formula for those aggressively seeking political power, is it?

**Read John 1:1–14. What is found in these texts that reveals to us why Jesus was so special, unique, in all human history?**

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We can read these famous words so often that we tend to forget just how incredible they really are. Dwell on the implications of what John is telling us. These should be words filled with hope, especially in contrast to the teachings of modern science, which has us all here as the mere by-products of some great cosmic accident, the result of blind forces that, purely by chance, created humanity. In other words, instead of us being the creations of a loving God, One who became “flesh, and dwelt among us” (*John 1:14*), we are just a complicated conglomeration of chemicals that just happened to form on the surface of this planet, and just as there was no meaning or purpose to our creation, there is no meaning and purpose to living and dying. What a contrast to the hope offered us through Jesus.

**What do you find especially encouraging about those verses in John 1? Write down your thoughts and bring them to class on Sabbath.**

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Who was Jesus Christ? Was He just a great teacher? Just a prophet? The Son of God? Divinity in the flesh? Most important, what is He to you? Is Jesus your Savior? Is He your example? Is He your Lord? What evidence do our lives give that reveal just how we view Jesus?

Ask your class members to describe how their understanding of, and relationship to, Jesus have changed or progressed over the years.

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

## Bible Commentary

### I. God With Us (*Review 1 John 1:1 with your class.*)

When humankind was first created, we walked with God; that is, God was able to manifest Himself to us in ways that He doesn't now. Sin caused alienation from God, which over the centuries and millennia became deeper and more pronounced, until it was assumed to be the natural order of things. Sin, death, alienation, sickness, unhappiness, fear, instability, war, and so forth are so common we just assume that's the way things are supposed to be. But that's not how it was supposed to be. No, not at all.

And Jesus came to change all this. He was God in the flesh, here, once again, so we could see Him, talk to Him, and know what He is like. Most important, He came to give us all a chance to start over and to have a new beginning now and for eternity.

**Consider This:** How do the following verses assure us of Christ's continuing love and care for us? *John 14:18–20, Luke 1:11.*

### II. Who Was Jesus? (*Review Luke 24:7 with your class.*)

**Consider This:** How did Jesus' life and teachings find their fulfillment in His death?

“As the inspired apostle John beheld the height, the depth, the breadth of the Father's love toward the perishing race, he was filled with adoration

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## Jesus Among Sinners and Publicans

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was also a human who lived and dwelt among us. As such, He had various kinds of human interactions, both with family and friends. The amazing thing about Christ was not so much that as a human He had interaction with other people; no, what is amazing is that He chose to interact with certain types of people.

**Read** Matthew 11:19; Mark 2:15, 16; Luke 15:1, 2. **What kinds of people was Jesus associating with? What kinds of people in your own society might have elicited the same response from other more “respectable” folk?**

Jesus came to reveal the character of God to all the world through both His life and His death. By associating with those who were considered, at least by worldly standards, lowlifes, Jesus was giving us a message about the character of God and about what God deems good and bad. As humans, we tend to look at the outward appearances (*1 Sam. 16:7*); God, though, looks at the heart, where He can see what we often do not.

**Read** Matthew 21:28–32. **How does that help us understand why Jesus associated with the kinds of people He did? What important message can we, those who are “religious and respectable,” take from this?**

Unlike us, Jesus knew the heart; Jesus saw what was going on inside those who, from the outside, looked so unworthy and so unpromising. At the same time, He knew what was going on inside those who, from the outside, looked so righteous and pious. We might be able to fool each other, and even ourselves, but never the Lord.

**What is your attitude toward the “publicans and sinners” of your own society? How much of the attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees do you harbor in your own heart? (Remember, these men were exceedingly self-deceived.)**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

and reverence. . . . Through transgression the sons of man became subjects of Satan. Through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the sons of Adam may become the sons of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 15.

**III. In the Beginning Was the Word** (*Review John 1:1–14 with your class.*)

John 1:1–14 leaves no room to doubt that Jesus was God in every sense imaginable. He was eternal and was the means by which the universe and the earth were created.

“John 1:1 is probably the clearest assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. It contains three brief but profound statements that complement each other by correcting the misunderstandings that would arise if any one of the three were examined in isolation from the others. . . .”—Jon Paulien, *John* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1995), p. 42.

**Consider This:** John 1:1–11 is an astounding series of statements. It cannot be denied. Look at John 1:14–18. What do these texts add?

**IV. The Human Jesus** (*Review Luke 15:1, 2 with your class.*)

**Consider This:** In Jesus’ time, people who considered themselves or aspired to be “holy” associated only with other holy people. This was a matter of ritual purity, and to do otherwise was nearly unthinkable. While we as Christians do not have formal ritual purity standards today, are there places or people we regard as too dangerous or damaged to bother with?

“Shepherds, the scribes ruled, could never really purge themselves from ritual pollution because they handled animals continually, and were thought to rob their masters. Women had dubious value as religious examples, despite the scriptural mention of Deborah, Miriam, and others. Yet a shepherd and a woman are the very ones whose desperate search, and exuberant joy upon finding, display God (Luke 15:4–6, 8, 9).”—Walter Scragg, *The God Who Says Yes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1987), pp. 86, 87.

**V. Hypocrisy and Hypocrites** (*Review Matt. 23:13 with your class.*)

**Consider This:** Jesus, as the above text suggests, didn’t take hypocrisy

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## Exposing the Hypocrites

**“But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matt. 23:13).**

Though we often picture the kind and gentle Jesus working gingerly and softly with the worst of sinners, that is not the whole picture presented in the Bible. On the contrary, when the time was right Jesus unleashed a torrent of warnings about and toward a certain group of people. As we all know, Jesus had strong words to speak against many of the religious leaders of ancient Israel, very strong words, in fact. Indeed, in some ways He sounded just as some of the Old Testament prophets did; which, of course, is not surprising, because He was the One who inspired them to write what they did to begin with. Thus, for centuries, in one venue or another, Jesus was pleading with His people. Is it any different today?

**Read Matthew 23. What were the charges Jesus was leveling against the leaders? How would you categorize them? Which, in your own mind, would be the worst, and why? If you could summarize in just a few sentences the essence of His complaints, what would you write?**

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If you really read carefully, all the things that Jesus accuses them of doing are amazing. One theme, however, comes through very clearly: These men were hypocrites, hiding the ugliness of their souls under the veneer of faith and piety.

What kind of outward show of piety do you put on? How different are you in private than in public? How might your local church view you if they knew the real you? What can you do to make the real you more like the public version?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

lightly. Why was He so uncompromising in regard to it?

“This hypocrisy [of the Pharisees] Christ declared would bring them the greater damnation. The same rebuke falls upon many in our day who make a high profession of piety. Their lives are stained by selfishness and avarice, yet they throw over it all a garment of seeming purity, and thus for a time deceive their fellow men. But they cannot deceive God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 614.

■ *Who is actually harmed the most by hypocrisy? Hypocrisy is a deadly sin that by definition is hidden, unlike those committed by “decent, honest” publicans and sinners.*

In spite of that, God loves hypocrites too much to want them to stay hypocrites. Ask for God’s help to become the real thing.

### ► **STEP 3—Practice**

#### Thought Questions:

1 People want to make Jesus into their own image. How do we sometimes try to squeeze Jesus into a mold we’ve created for Him? Why is that easier to do than we often think?

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2 How do you think people can claim to admire Jesus while ignoring or discounting the things He said, including the things the Gospels record Him saying about Himself?

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#### Application Questions:

1 Jesus was known for associating with society’s outcasts. As humans, we tend to associate with those most like ourselves, and as Christians we tend to associate with other Christians. How do we reconcile these impulses?

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2 The Pharisees seemed to hope to achieve perfection and “godliness”

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## Love for the Hypocrites

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8*).

**What** is the message of the above text? How seriously do we take it? That is, do we understand that Christ’s death included the worst sinners, even the hypocrites we read about yesterday?

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The amazing thing about the life of Jesus was that even amid the harshest circumstances He never lost sight of His mission: to save the lost. Even as He hung on the cross, even as the weight of the world’s sin was crushing out His life, the good of others was constantly on His mind. (*See Luke 23:34, 42, 43; John 19:26.*) What a powerful lesson for us, we who are called to follow in His footsteps.

This applies to the religious leaders that Jesus railed against. Yesterday we read His scathing denunciations against them, as recorded in Matthew 23.

**Read** Matthew 23:37. How is it different in tone from the rest of the chapter? What does this tell us about Jesus and His feelings toward even those He just denounced? What very important principle is found here for us? How can we take what we see here and apply it in our own lives and our treatment of others, even those who reject our overtures toward them?

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Missionary work is not easy. Look at what happened when Jesus Himself was here. Look at how so many reacted. Yet, even toward the worst Jesus showed love and care and compassion. Our feelings toward those who reject us should not be anger or resentment; they should be of pity, of concern, and of care. When people refuse to listen, they are not rejecting us personally; they are rejecting Jesus.

**How do you respond to those who react negatively toward your witness? How can you learn to feel compassion, as opposed to anger and resentment? Why would anger and resentment only make things worse?**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

without the direct intervention of God. Are we ever guilty of a similar attitude? If so, how so?

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**Witnessing**

There has never been more information about Jesus available, but much of it is incorrect or misleading. How can we help those to whom we witness better understand the truth about Jesus, about who He was, what He was like, and what He has done for us? Why is it so important that we, individually, know Jesus? How much better our witness would be if we truly knew the One whom we were talking about!

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**Consider This:** Paul stated in Philippians 1:18 that “The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (*NIV*).

**► STEP 4—Apply**

**Consider This:** Ask class members to share those aspects of Jesus Christ’s teachings, life, and ministry that speak most to them personally. Offer the following suggestions for renewing or rediscovering the freshness of their relationship with Jesus and possibly conveying it to others.

- 1 Rewrite a favorite story from the Gospels about Jesus, with yourself in the place of the individual that Jesus is interacting with. How would you feel? What would it motivate you to do?
- 2 The next time you pray, really talk to Jesus. Say what is on your mind. How would the Jesus you know from the Gospels respond?
- 3 Don’t be a hypocrite. Ask for help from Jesus and others to admit and overcome your faults.
- 4 Asking “What Would Jesus Do?” seemed like a really good idea, until people started wearing it on their T-shirts and not doing it. Try actually doing what Jesus would do. How would your actions be radically different from what they are now?

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Woes on the Pharisees,” pp. 610–620, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The Pharisees thought themselves too wise to need instruction, too righteous to need salvation, too highly honored to need the honor that comes from Christ. The Saviour turned away from them to find others who would receive the message of heaven. In the untutored fishermen, in the publican at the market place, in the woman of Samaria, in the common people who heard Him gladly, He found His new bottles for the new wine. The instrumentalities to be used in the gospel work are those souls who gladly receive the light which God sends them. These are His agencies for imparting the knowledge of truth to the world.”  
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 279.

“We may do much in a short time if we will work as Christ worked. We may reflect with profit upon His manner of teaching. He sought to meet the minds of the common people. His style was plain, simple, comprehensive. He took His illustrations from the scenes with which His hearers were most familiar. By the things of nature He illustrated truths of eternal importance, thus connecting heaven and earth.”  
—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 565.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Why is the idea of Jesus as just a great moral teacher not good enough? What hope do we have if Christ were only a moral teacher and nothing else? Look at the C. S. Lewis quote from the introduction for Sabbath’s study. Why is that such a powerful argument in favor of the deity of Christ? Or is it? What options do we have if Jesus isn’t the Son of God?
- ② As a class, discuss your answer to Monday’s last question.
- ③ Whatever we might have to say about the Pharisees, one point we shouldn’t forget. They were members of God’s remnant church, the elite of the only faith in the world that had present truth. What’s the message, and warning, for us in that fact?

**Summary:** The story of Jesus is the most important story in history. His life and teachings show us not only the way to live and how to treat one another but also the way to eternal life—by believing in the salvation He brought to us through His death on the Cross.