

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, or clothe enough naked, to earn redemption?

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?

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.

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 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?

“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.

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?

What Took So Long?

by PRUDENCIO TORRES

My brother, Hipolito, accepted the Adventist faith while living in New York City some years ago. When he returned to Puerto Rico, he shared his faith with me and invited me to church. I was still a teenager and was not sure how my family would feel if I visited another church. I knew they felt there was only one church—our church.

I visited the Adventist church occasionally and made some friends there. But for the most part what I learned didn't change my life. I married, and we moved to our own home. Some Adventists lived nearby and visited us often. We agreed to study the Bible with them, and the next year my wife accepted Jesus and joined the Adventist Church. But I didn't. I attended church with her and returned tithe, but I didn't take a stand for God.

Then my mother became terminally ill. My brother and I took the Adventist pastor to visit her often. We shared Bible promises with her, and she accepted Jesus as her Lord before she died.

The church we attend divided itself into small groups that meet in members' homes. We opened our home for one small-group meeting and invited our neighbors. The group grew to 13 members, and we decided to start a new congregation. My father gave us a piece of land on which to build a small chapel, and we set to work. Everyone helped when they could, but my wife and I did most of the work or paid to have it done. The small group grew and was organized into a company with 25 members.

Finally, after waiting 27 years, I sealed my commitment to Christ and was baptized. Today our congregation is an organized church with more than fifty members. My father visits our little church occasionally, and two other brothers and their families are attending church. One is preparing for baptism.

What took me so long? I have no excuse. My unwillingness to make a commitment to Christ cost a lot of years and missed opportunities to share my faith. But God was patient and gracious to me. He waited for me, and He has saved me. However, I wonder how my life would have been different if I had made my decision years ago when I first knew these wonderful truths.

Mission offerings help raise up new churches in Puerto Rico and around the world.

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