

Jesus' Wise Teachings



SABBATH—APRIL 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 5–7; Matthew 20:25–28; John 4:22–24; John 8:1–11.

MEMORY VERSE: “The people were amazed [surprised] at his [Jesus'] teaching. He taught them like one who had authority [wisdom; power]. He did not talk like the teachers of the law” (Mark 1:22, NlrV).

JESUS COULD HAVE FLASHED bright beams of light on the darkest mysteries of science. But He wanted to give as much time as He could to teaching the knowledge of the science of salvation.¹ His time, His knowledge, His brains, His life itself, were dedicated to and focused on working out the salvation of the souls of men.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character,² and Personality*, volume 1, page 245.

There is a danger in talking about Jesus' wise teachings (as in the title of this week's lesson). By doing so, we could make the mistake of not putting that much difference between Jesus and other (so-called) wise teachers throughout history. Jesus' teachings were not just wise. His teachings had something that the teachings of world-famous thinkers and teachers have not had. There was something final and authoritative (powerful; convincing) about Jesus' teachings. This is because it was *God talking in human form*. The people did not know much about who Christ really was. But they still could tell there was something special about Him and what He said. “The crowds were amazed [surprised] at his teaching. He taught like one who had authority [power; truth]” (Matthew 7:28, 29, NlrV).

This week we will look at just what some of those teachings were.

1. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved.

2. character—who you are; all the things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

SUNDAY—APRIL 20**THE GREATEST SERMON
(Matthew 5–7)**

Year after year, hundreds of thousands of sermons have been given throughout history and been forgotten. Some are remembered for a while, then forgotten. But there is one special sermon, given two thousand years ago, that is still remembered. It is even known by the place where it was given. This sermon is the Sermon on the Mount.

During the First World War, a group named the Society of Friends printed the Sermon on the Mount as a separate pamphlet, without added comments. The pamphlets were intended for all of the soldiers of the Allied (American, British, and French) forces. But both the British and French governments did not permit the pamphlets to be given to their troops. After all, they did not want to give a sermon to men at war telling them to love their enemies!

Read through the Beatitudes³ (Matthew 5:2–12). Which parts do you find very meaningful for the experiences you are going through right now?

In the Beatitudes some parts describe the condition⁴ in which we

may find ourselves. The person who “mourns,” for example, does not try to be sad. Instead, he is trying to be humble and do what is right. The prophet (special messenger) once said: “Continue to do what is right. Don’t [Do not] be proud” (Zephaniah 2:3, NIV). Trying to be righteous (holy) is not natural to us humans (men, women, and children). And we cannot make ourselves holy. But we are told to seek God’s help in living a holy life.

Give a brief summary of the following teachings that appear (among others) in the rest of the sermon:

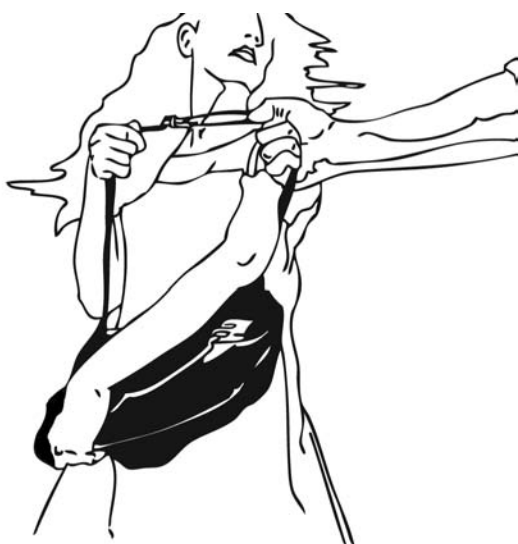
- 1. Our influence⁵ in society (Matthew 5:13–16)**
- 2. The law of God (Matthew 5:17–20)**
- 3. Heart religion (Matthew 5:21–30)**
- 4. Divorce (Matthew 5:31, 32)**
- 5. Retaliation (revenge) (Matthew 5:38–42)**
- 6. Love for enemies (Matthew 5:43–48)**
- 7. Prayer (Matthew 6:5–15)**

As you study the Beatitudes and the rest of the sermon, which parts are most meaningful to you? Which ones cut across your usual ways more sharply? What changes do you need to make in order to follow these words from God more closely?

3. the Beatitudes—ten rules for happy Christian living given by Jesus in Matthew 5:2–12.

4. condition—the way a person or thing is; a state of being.

5. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.



Jesus asks us to love our enemies and pray for those who hurt us.

MONDAY—APRIL 21

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT GOD (Matthew 5:8, 9)

Jesus came into a dark world that did not understand the person and character of God. He wanted to set things straight by His life and by His Word. Being God Himself, Jesus brought the most perfect example of God. In the past, the prophets had spoken about God; but now, “in these last days,” God was speaking “by his Son . . . through whom he made the universe” (Hebrews 1:1, 2, NIV). Through Jesus, we have the perfect example of God.

What is Jesus saying about God in Matthew 5:8, 9; Matthew 18:5, 6, 10; Matthew 19:13, 14; John 4:22–24; and John 10:27–30?

6. underdog—one who is the least favored to survive or win an event.

7. psychopaths—mentally ill people who sometimes kill to gain their desires.

How good a society (community) is depends on the value it puts upon its weakest members. And the weakest are children. Jesus' love for these children must have come as a breath of fresh air to those poor mothers two thousand years ago. This happened when He let children come to Him. He made time in His busy calendar for these little kids, time to touch them and to bless them.



Jesus showed that God cares for children and all who are weak and helpless.

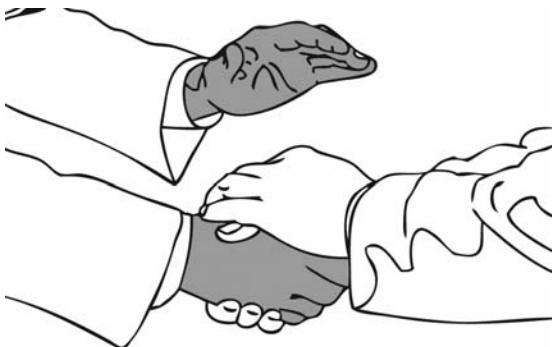
God is like that. Jesus' action showed it. God cares for the children and all who are weak and helpless. He is the God of the underdog.⁶ Jesus sat there with these little children looking into His face. He must have thought about the mass killing of children by Herod (Matthew 2:16–18). And He must have remembered the bloody command of a pharaoh in the past against all Jewish male babies (Exodus 1:15, 16). Jesus came to be an example of a God who was the complete opposite of these murderous psychopaths.⁷

From what you have read above, what picture of God does Jesus give? How have you experienced these parts of God's character yourself? Even more important, how well do you show those parts of His character in your own life?

TUESDAY—APRIL 22

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT FORGIVENESS (Matthew 6:12–14)

Of all the parts of Jesus' character, *forgiveness* has to be at the top. Jesus and forgiveness go together. Jesus was going through the most painful suffering on the cross. Soldiers and people mocked and abused Him. But the heartbreaking words came out through His dying lips: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34, NIV). And in the Sermon on the Mount, He even said that if we do not forgive those who do us wrong, then we should not expect God to forgive our sins against Him (Matthew 6:12, 14, 15).



If we want Jesus to forgive us, we must forgive others.

8. compare—to show how two things are the same.

9. contrast—to show how two things are different.

What is Jesus teaching about forgiveness in Mark 2:5–12; Luke 7:36–50; Luke 17:3, 4; and John 8:1–11?

These are wonderful statements about forgiveness. But how do we balance out the difference between what it is to be forgiven and not to be forgiven? Study the following verses about Peter and Judas for the answers: Matthew 12:31, 32; Matthew 18:6; Mark 14:21.

In Mark 14:21, Jesus warned about the fate (punishment) of the "man who betrays the Son of Man." But suppose that man were to confess and repent? Compare⁸ and contrast⁹ the different actions of Judas and Peter after their separate betrayals of Jesus. After witnessing Jesus' arrest, Judas seemed to be sorry. He returned the betrayal money to the officials. He seemed to use the proper words: "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matthew 27:3, 4, NIV). Judas made a public example of being sorrowful. But Peter cried in silence. Peter did not return to Caiaphas' judgment hall to make up for his shameful betrayal. Still, Judas was not forgiven, and Peter was forgiven. What was the key to the difference between these two men?

How are we to understand forgiveness? For example, a woman

can forgive a husband who beats her. But does forgiveness mean leaving oneself open to more abuse? How can we forgive and, at the same time, be wise enough to protect ourselves and others from those who have broken our trust?

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 23

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT BEING HUMBLE (Matthew 20:25–28)

In a 1995 survey, some athletes were asked the following question: “Suppose there was a drug you could take that would guarantee you’d [you would] receive a gold medal at the Olympics. But the drug would kill you in five years. Would you take it?” More than 50 percent said Yes. It shows how attractive fame and power are to people. To be “in front of the camera” is an attraction. To have millions of people worshipping you as a hero is another attraction. These attractions are very popular in the twenty-first century.

That same general spirit can invade the church. So we need to always remain on guard. The lust for power over others (the drive to be in control; the hunger for first place) has not faded with the passing of the years.

Study Matthew 18:1–6; Matthew 20:25–28; Matthew 23:1, 5–12; and 1 Peter 5:1–4 about this strong drive for power and glory at the top.

The harsh (rough) events of history sometimes have sent proud dictators to poverty or to jail where they must take orders from prison wardens. There even have been times when a king gives up the throne for a short time to be with poor members of society. But all these cases are nothing when compared to the humbling experience Christ went through. He was God of the universe. “Instead, he [Jesus] made himself nothing. He took on the very nature of a servant. He was made in human form. . . . He came down to the lowest level. He obeyed God completely, even though it led to his death. In fact, he died on a cross!” (Philippians 2:5–8, NIV).

When we read how Jesus died a humble death on the cross, why should all forms of self-glory be brought to shame? How can we protect ourselves from thinking that we are better than Jesus?

THURSDAY—APRIL 24

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT GRACE¹⁰—AND FAITH (Ephesians 2:8, 9)

“God’s grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn’t [does not] come from anything you do. It is God’s gift” (Ephesians 2:8, 9, NIV). The words are from the apostle¹¹ Paul as he thought about the Christian message

10. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

11. apostle—a disciple (follower) of Jesus who preached the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven.

of salvation. And Paul explained it differently than Jesus did. A person might be tempted to ask whether Jesus believed in righteousness (holiness) by faith. But to ask that question is to greatly misunderstand both Paul and Jesus. Jesus' way of teaching about grace seemed to go in a different direction. So we should be careful about describing God's marvelous act of grace in Jesus, and our answer to it.

Jesus came as the perfect example of grace. He was grace in person. To argue with Him was to argue with grace. "We have seen his glory," John wrote, "the glory of the One and Only, . . . full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, NIV).

In Matthew 14:28–31; Matthew 20:1–15; Luke 7:36–48; Luke 15:11–31; and John 8:1–11, what is Jesus teaching about grace and faith?

From these verses, we learn something of the many ways Jesus taught about grace. He taught through His parables (short, simple stories that teach a truth) and through the examples of His own life. How could Peter ever forget how helpless he was in a storm that night on the lake? His only safety was to cry out to a Power beyond himself. And quickly the answer was there! No delay. No need for being sorry. No difficult requirement. Just three simple words, coming from Peter's helplessness: "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30, NIV). And quickly the hand of Jesus was on him. That is grace.



Without Jesus, we are as helpless as Peter was that stormy night on the lake (Matthew 14:30).

Of the different examples listed above, which one speaks to you most powerfully of God's grace? You have received such grace yourself, so how can you be more willing to give it to others who need it, too?

FRIDAY—APRIL 25

ADDITIONAL STUDY: According to historian Huston Smith, Jesus' teachings "may be the most repeated [often spoken and shared] in history. 'Love your neighbor as yourself. What you would like people to do to you, do to them. Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden [burdened], and I will give you rest. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' Most of the time, Jesus told stories: of buried treasure, of sowers who went out to sow, of pearl merchants, of a good Samaritan.

People who heard these stories were moved to say, 'This man speaks with authority. Never spoke man thus!' . . . The most impressive [wonderful] thing about the teachings of Jesus is that he has practiced what he taught. From the stories that we have, Jesus' entire life consisted of humble sacrifice and love without self-glory or self-praise. The greatest proof of his humble life is that we cannot find anything that shows what Jesus thought of himself. He didn't [did not] worry about that. He was more interested in what people thought of God. . . . We have seen that Jesus ignored the 'walls' that separate people. He loved children. He hated injustice [what is not fair]. And he hated hypocrisy¹² even more because it hid people from themselves."—Adapted from *The Illustrated World's Religions*, pages 212, 213.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Many issues that have concerned us in recent times Jesus never touched upon (drug abuse, health reform [a change for the better], homosexuality,¹³ slavery, cloning,¹⁴ abortion,¹⁵ and so on). What conclusions should we draw from the fact Jesus did not speak about these issues directly? What conclusions should we not draw?
- ❷ How might Jesus' teaching on forgiveness influence issues of world problems today? How can Christians use that teaching to solve problems in their homes, churches, and communities (a group of people living, working, or worshiping together)? When is forgiveness not the answer to certain problems faced by nations and individuals? Or is it always the answer?
- ❸ People like the Sermon on the Mount, but they often ignore it when they face the real problems of life. Why do you think this is so? How is it in your own life? In what ways could you try to use these principles (rules) in your own walk with the Lord?

12. hypocrisy—pretending to do and say the right thing when you are in front of certain people so they will think well of you.

13. homosexuality—being attracted sexually to persons of the same sex as one's own.

14. cloning—a way of producing a new plant or animal that is exactly like an existing one. This new plant or animal is grown from a single body cell of its parent and has the same genes as its parent.

15. abortion—the act of taking out an embryo or fetus (unborn baby) from its mother's womb before the embryo or fetus is old enough to stay alive.