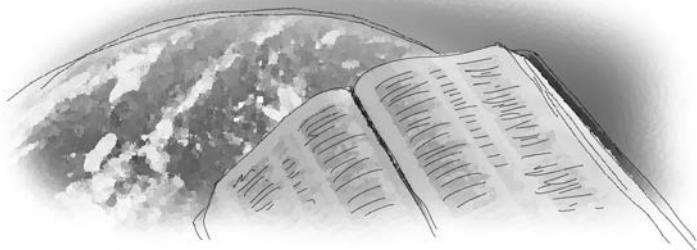


Discipling *the* Nations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 56:6–8; Matt. 11:20–24; John 12:20–32; Rom. 15:12; Acts 1:7, 8.*

Memory Text: “‘For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’ ” (*Isaiah 56:7, NKJV*).

Christ's message, from its inception, was destined for everyone everywhere. Early on, the gospel went worldwide, because it is universally applicable. Doubtless, this concept challenged the disciples' thinking. Their initial reaction, for instance, to Christ's conversing with the Samaritan woman illustrates this challenge. They thought that Jesus as the Messiah was merely the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies and hopes. Somehow they had missed or misinterpreted the prophets, especially Isaiah, whose message encompassed all peoples. Jesus, the Desire of all nations, was not to be limited to a single group. Salvation might be of the Jews, but it was for everyone. Christ's followers would transcend national boundaries, international conflicts, language differences, and other difficulties, because He had established the pattern of cross-cultural evangelism.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we especially see this call in Revelation 14:6—“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*NKJV*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 8.

The Prophets Foretold

Ancient prophets foretold the conversion of non-Jewish people (Gentiles) to a scripturally based faith. Heathen deities, pagan worship, and destructive lifestyles would be toppled by uncompromising submission to, and faith in, Jehovah. Israel's enemies would stream into Jerusalem begging for admission, thirsting for spiritual knowledge. Israel's commission was to broadcast God's universal invitation to the surrounding nations.

Unfortunately, Israel's missionary passion was derailed by earthly concerns. The grand vision was buried beneath complacency. Christ's coming resurrected that vision, at least for some.

Read Isaiah 56:6–8; Micah 4:1, 2; Jonah 3:7–10; 4:1. What do these verses teach about universal outreach, and about how limited some in Israel were in understanding it?

Israel was to be the light of the nations. Seeing the wonderful advantages that the Israelites had, heathen nations would inquire about the Israelites' monotheistic faith, and thus many of them would be converted to the true God.

Unfortunately, that's not how things generally turned out, as Israel became so inwardly focused that it lost sight of its larger purpose and, often, the God who had offered it so much.

Modern Christians face a similar challenge. Will they sacrificially invest in furthering the gospel, or will they become inwardly focused, forgetting their larger purpose? It's an easier trap to fall into than we realize.

“In the name of the Lord let us lift up our voices in praise and thanksgiving for the results of work abroad.

“And still our General, who never makes a mistake, says to us: ‘Advance. Enter new territory. Lift up the standard in every land. ‘Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.’”

“Our watchword is to be: Onward, ever onward. The angels of God will go before us to prepare the way. Our burden for the ‘regions beyond’ can never be laid down until the whole earth shall be lightened with the glory of the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 28, 29.

Woe Unto Thee!

Read Matthew 11:20–24, Luke 4:25–30, 17:11–19, John 10:16. What crucial message comes from these texts? How can we take what is written here and apply it to ourselves, in our own time and context? What principle is revealed here that we have to be very careful about?

Christ wanted His own people, those who had so many advantages, to wake up to what their true calling and purpose was as a people. He wanted them to see that salvation, even for the chosen nation, was not something that a person is born into. It's not passed on in the genes or by a birthright. It was something that requires a conscious choice to accept, a choice that even those who weren't of Israel could, and did, make.

Athletic coaches sometimes challenge their athletes by comparing them with competing schools or organizations. "If you'd practice as faithfully, energetically, and intensely as they do, you'd enjoy success." The coach's obvious motivation is to inspire, to build up desire rather than diminish it.

In the same way, Jesus wanted His own people to share the fullness of salvation as some non-Jewish people were already doing. No doubt His words scandalized some because He preached something that they didn't want to hear, however much these truths should have already been known and understood by them.

Some people might indeed have many spiritual advantages that others don't have, but those who have these advantages must realize that, whatever they have been given, they are all gifts from God, to be used for His glory and not their own.

What about us? What about all the advantages that we, as a people, have been given by God? Why is it important, first, to recognize those advantages; then, second, humbly to realize the responsibilities that come with them?

“We Would See Jesus”

Read John 12:20–32. How is the universality of the gospel message revealed in these verses?

Jerusalem was buzzing with rumors. Christ’s triumphal entry had just occurred. Hosannas, though, were quickly replaced by questions. What was going to happen next? Would Jesus be crowned king?

Among the crowd assembling for Passover were Greek worshippers. Notice their words to Philip, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” In other words, they wanted to see Jesus. They wanted to be with Him. They wanted to learn from Him. What a testimony to the universal character of Christ and His message! How sad, too, that those who should have said the same thing were the very ones who wanted to be rid of Him.

The Greeks probably approached Philip because he carried a Greek name. Coming from Bethsaida, a commercial fishing center—hence, a cultural melting pot—he probably spoke their language too. The text suggests that Jesus was not immediately present. Perhaps He worshiped nearby in places reserved for Jews.

However, then joining His disciples and the Greek interviewers within the outer court, Jesus granted these men their wish. Notice what He said to them: “If any man,” meaning any man, woman, Jew, or Greek, wanted to follow Him, they could, but it would come at a cost.

What was that cost? How do we understand the meaning of this? See *John 12:25*.

Then, with these foreigners still present, heaven thundered a confirming message of judgment and conquest. That Voice was heard, Jesus said, not for Him but for them, Jew and Greek, that their faith could be strengthened. Christ’s words immediately affirmed that His death was to be for all the world.

Breaking Down Barriers

Read John 7:35, 8:48, Luke 10:27–37. In what way do these verses show why regional, ethnic, and other barriers should have no place among Christians as they seek to make disciples among all nations?

Some of the leaders' contempt for Jesus knew no bounds. Again, the terrible irony was that those who should have been in the forefront of receiving Him and His message were the very ones who fought against Him the hardest. Priests of Israel scorned the Son of God when those not of Israel accepted Him as the Messiah. What a powerful and sobering lesson is here for those who deem themselves (perhaps with some justification) spiritually advantaged!

When condemning Christ, they not only labeled Him as having a devil, they made it worse by calling Him a Samaritan, as well. They even mocked Him for His witness among the Greeks, showing obviously their contempt for those not of their own nation and faith. Israel's leaders found it unthinkable that Jesus would consider teaching Greeks. Jesus countered this by emphasizing character above ethnic origin.

How interesting, too, that He used the true story of a Samaritan in order to teach a powerful spiritual lesson about what it meant truly to fulfill God's law. Religious leaders, doubtless restrained by their twisted understanding of Levitical law and defilement, had earlier bypassed the wounded man. The despised foreigner, a Samaritan, had conscientiously defied ethnic prejudice, saving the stranger's life. What a stinging rebuke to all those who spurn and scorn someone in need only because the person is not of their own ethnic, social, or cultural background.

Think of the last time you perhaps did not help someone in need. What justifications did you use not to help? Looking back now, what should you have done differently?

The Great Commission

Read Romans 15:12; Acts 1:7, 8; John 11:52, 53; Matthew 28:19, 20.
What's the essential message here, and how does this message fit in so well with the three angels' messages of Revelation 14?

God's final work is incomplete until the eternal gospel expressed in the message of the three angels found in Revelation 14 has crossed every racial, ethnic, national, and geographical boundary. Without divulging the precise timing, Scripture unequivocally states that this gospel will reach around the world. God's triumph and its proclamation are assured.

The nations' acceptance of that message is prophesied. This must happen, but who will offer themselves as God's channels of grace? Who will join Christ in the overturning of the racial, ethnic, and language barriers that impede the gospel's progress? Who will empty their wallets and pocketbooks? Who will sacrifice earthly comforts and family associations in order to advance heaven's cause? These are the questions that we all must ask ourselves. What are we doing to reach out to others, whoever and wherever they are? How unfortunate that some believers allow racial stereotypes, cultural prejudices, and satanically designed social barriers to dissuade them from vigorous gospel proclamation when their fellow believers are scattered across the globe, willingly yielding their lives that the gospel might be preached.

"Our missionary success has been fully proportionate to our self-denying, self-sacrificing effort. God alone can estimate the work accomplished as the gospel message has been proclaimed in clear, straight lines. New fields have been entered, and aggressive work has been done. The seeds of truth have been sown, the light has flashed upon many minds, bringing enlarged views of God and a more correct estimate as to the character to be formed. Thousands have been brought to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. They have been imbued with the faith that works by love and purifies the soul."
—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 28.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34; “Pentecost,” pp. 35–46, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “In the Outer Court,” pp. 621–626; “The Good Samaritan,” pp. 497–505, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“A certain Samaritan, in his journey, came where the sufferer was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. He did not question whether the stranger was a Jew or a Gentile. . . .

“Thus the question, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ is forever answered. Christ has shown that our neighbor does not mean merely one of the church or faith to which we belong. It has no reference to race, color, or class distinction. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 503.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does our financial support of the church’s worldwide mission indicate about our real commitment to the gospel commission? Why must our involvement reach beyond mere financial support? In what ways can funds presently allocated to church preservation be channeled into cross-cultural evangelism?
- 2 “We are not to feel that the work of the gospel depends principally upon the minister. To every man God has given a work to do in connection with His kingdom. Everyone who professes the name of Christ is to be an earnest, disinterested worker, ready to defend the principles of righteousness. Every soul should take an active part in advancing the cause of God. Whatever our calling, as Christians we have a work to do in making Christ known to the world. We are to be missionaries, having for our chief aim the winning of souls to Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 427. In class, dwell on the meaning of what is written here and, as a class, ask what more you could do to help finish the work that we have been called to do.
- 3 Dwell more on what Jesus said in John 12:25. What does it mean to “hate” our life “in this world”? In what ways are we to express this “hatred”?

A Louder Voice

The Central Sofia Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bulgaria had a vision to record Sabbath School lessons and sermons to upload on the Internet for anyone to watch. They had purchased the camera and other basic equipment to operate the studio, but they needed a few more pieces of equipment. Where would they get the money to buy the needed equipment? They prayed and they searched, but they hadn't been able to complete the studio.

Then one Sabbath after vespers, a Bulgarian couple from abroad found Lena and told her, "We've heard about your recording studio, and we want to help you. What do you need?"

Lena's breath caught in her throat. *This is it!* she thought. *God is doing what He has promised.* "We need an air conditioner to protect the equipment from the heat," she said.

"Make a list of what you need," the man said. Lena and the pastor gave the man a list of equipment needed to complete the studio. The cost was about \$15,000 in U.S. dollars. As they gave the list to the couple, the pastor said, "Choose what you'd like to help us with. Only the air conditioner is urgent."

The man and his wife agreed to buy all the equipment, and soon the Internet station was up and running.

Word of the Adventist Internet site spread quickly, and people began watching.

An old woman called the church to say that her church in a small Bulgarian village had only a handful of aging Adventists with no pastor. They felt they had no option but to close the church. Then the woman's son brought a computer and set it up in the church so the members could join the believers in Sofia via the live video feed through the Internet. "Not only did the church not close," the woman said, "but ten new people are coming to church to watch the video worships."

A man reported that he is a sailor aboard a ship. He isn't an Adventist, but he was searching for an inspirational Web site on the ship's computer. The only Web site he could pick up was the Sofia church's. None of the 30 crew members are Adventist, but they like the programming and watch regularly. "Now when we're in port, I visit an Adventist church and several other sailors come with me," he said.

In the three years that the Web site has been operating, the church has seen ample evidence of how God can use such resources to reach searching souls for Jesus. Our mission offerings help implement creative ministry around the world.

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