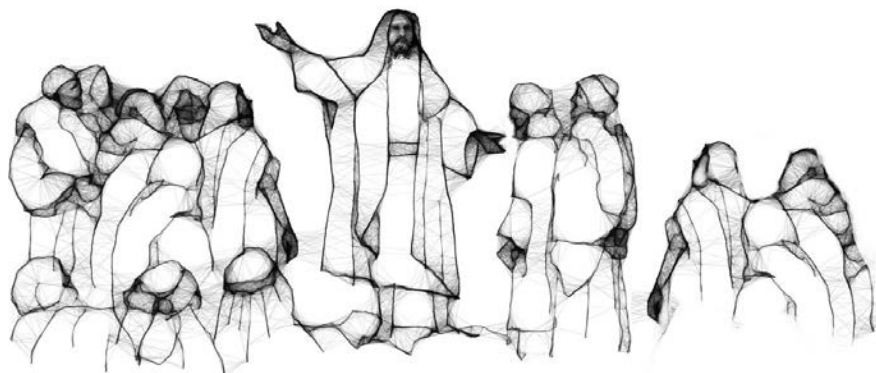


Jesus: The Master of Missions



SABBATH—AUGUST 8

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Timothy 1:8, 9; Isaiah 42:1–9; Daniel 9:24–27; Luke 2:8–14; Matthew 10:5, 6; Acts 1:1–14.

MEMORY VERSE: “Again Jesus said, ‘May peace be with you! The Father has sent me. So now I am sending you’ ” (John 20:21, NlrV).

ACCORDING TO THE HOLY BIBLE, THE BASIC WORK OF THE TRINITY (THREE-IN-ONE GOD) IS MISSION. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are involved in saving people. Their work began at the Fall and continues through until the end. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will then restore (make better than before) this saved world to full unity (oneness) with God's will.

According to the Gospels, Jesus underwent the big change into human form that was necessary for His mission to succeed. In Jesus Christ, the meaning of history is better understood. The total mission work of God becomes united (joined into one work). And the deepest needs of humans for meaningful lives are fulfilled.

In the New Testament, we learn of the purposes of Jesus Christ in becoming a human. We also find an outline for the program of mission. In the Gospels, we get examples of how Jesus met people from other nations and people of other faiths. In the Word of God, we learn of the great work of God in saving sinners.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (2 Timothy 1:8, 9)

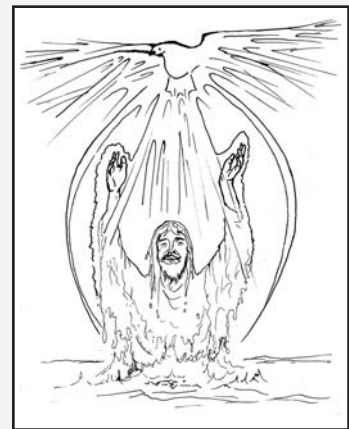
Second Timothy 1:8, 9 are great verses for explaining that believing in salvation by works is useless. But these verses also reveal the eternal nature of salvation. They teach us that our salvation had been planned long, long ago.

So it is no wonder that all through the Old Testament Jesus Christ is revealed in one way or another. Especially powerful are the prophecies (special messages from God), which clearly teach that Jesus is really the Messiah (Chosen One).

Read Isaiah 61:1; Daniel 9:24–27; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:6; and Isaiah 42:1–9. What do these verses say about Jesus and His work as Messiah?

The prophet (special messenger) Isaiah describes the mission of Jesus in these words: “ ‘Here is my servant. I take good care of him. I have chosen him. I am very pleased with him. I will put my Spirit on him. He will make everything right among the nations. . . . I, the LORD, have chosen you to do what is right. I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you safe. You will put my covenant [promise] with the people of Israel into effect. And you will be a light for the other nations. You will open the eyes that can’t [cannot] see. You will set prisoners free. Those who sit in darkness will come out of their cells’ ” (Isaiah 42:1, 6, 7, NIV).

Think deeply about the wonderful idea that Jesus, the Creator, came to us in human form. And in that human form He lived and died as He did. What great hope does this offer you in a world that offers no hope at all?



All through the Old Testament, Jesus is shown to be the Messiah (Chosen One).

THE DESIRE OF AGES (Luke 2:8–14)



The believers became the living temple.

Jesus Christ is Lord of both the church and the world. His coming is a fulfillment of the Old Testament expectations of a saved community that would include both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). The coming of Jesus brought in a new time period in which the separation between Jew and Gentile disappears. Jerusalem would remain the center, at least for a while. But Herod's temple in Jerusalem was no longer important. Instead, what was important were the Jews who had given their lives to Christ. They had become the living temple. These Christian Jews would then be the true "remnant [small group of believers]" of Israel who at that time in the early church were the ones called to bring the gospel to the world.

This announcement of the worldwide mission of Christ as Savior of all nations was repeated at His birth, during His childhood, and at His baptism.

What do Luke 2:8–14; Luke 2:25–33; Luke 3:3–6; and John 1:29 teach about the worldwide mission of Jesus?

No question, Jesus came as the Savior for all people who have accepted Him. *What does this truth mean for us, especially when we are mission-minded?*

"The missionary spirit needs to be brought back to life in our churches. Every member of the church should study how to help push forward the work of God, both in home missions and in foreign countries. A thousandth part of the work is being done that should be done in missionary fields. God calls upon His workers to add new territory for Him. There are rich fields of work waiting for the faithful worker."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 6, page 29.

MISSION TO THE JEWS (Matthew 10:5, 6)

“ ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel’ ” (Matthew 15:24, NIV).

Between His first public appearance and His death on the cross, Jesus centered His ministry (work done for God) on Jewish people, especially in the area of Galilee. The Lord addressed Himself first to Israel. Before the Cross, there are very few messages of good news to the Gentiles. Clearly Jesus wanted to awaken the Jewish people to their place, purpose, and work in God’s mission for lost humans. Israel was to have the opportunity to be the witness of God’s message to the world.

Read Matthew 10:5, 6. Why would Jesus say here what He did? How do we understand these words in the larger picture of what Christ came to do and of missions as a whole? Contrast¹ this verse with Matthew 28:19.

When we consider the life and ministry of Jesus, we must understand the clear difference between His thinking, principles (standards; guidelines), and planning on one side, and the way He acted out these purposes on the other. In His day-to-day life and ministry, Jesus placed Himself in the Jewish culture, just as the Old Testament said He would. But Jesus’ being human was for the benefit of all kinds of people. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection (return to life from the dead), He would accept the sins of all the world (John 1:29).

We learn here an important biblical principle (important rule) for establishing mission. The first goal was to create a center in order to establish a strong and stable mission base: in Israel and among the Jewish people. When that was done, mission could next spread out from the center to all the world.

Think about your home church. How well does it serve as an example of the ideas expressed above: a strong base that later is able to reach out to others? How can you avoid the danger, which many churches face, of being self-centered, worrying about your own needs instead of witness and mission?

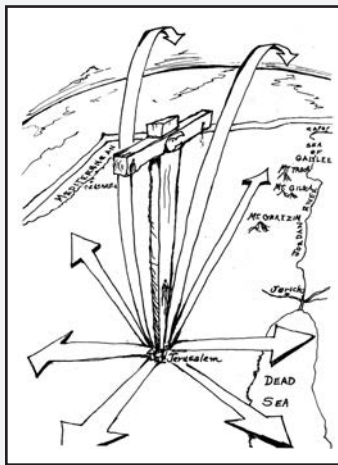
DEFINITIONS

1. contrast—show how two or more things are different.

MISSION TO THE GENTILES (Matthew 5:13, 14)

Jesus spent a large part of His time among the Jews. He served them in their cultural setting. But He made clear in His teaching and ministry that His mission was worldwide. The gospel, He taught, should be preached to the nations, with Israel as the home base. The salvation of the Gentiles is part of God's plan. It was an important part of Jesus' teaching.

How do the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:13, 14; Mark 14:9; Luke 14:10–24; and Matthew 13:36–43 reveal mission to non-Jewish people?



Jesus taught that the gospel should be preached to all nations.

Jesus ministered (worked for God) mainly among the Jews. But there is no question that from the very start His mission was for the whole world. Right at His baptism, John the Baptist said it clearly: “ ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (John 1:29, NKJV). The word *world* (Greek *kosmos*) is used about one hundred times in the Gospels (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). About half of these speak of the worldwide work of Jesus as the Savior.

In the parable (a very short story that teaches a lesson) Jesus told in Luke 14:16–24, those invited made all kinds of excuses for not coming. Read those excuses again. On one level, none appear unreasonable, do they? What important lesson should we learn from this for ourselves?

THE GREAT COMMAND (Matthew 28:18–20)

Jesus spent the 40 days between His resurrection and His return to heaven preparing the disciples and His church for worldwide evangelism.² Matthew's Gospel gives us the best-known statement by Jesus commanding that the gospel is to go into all the world. But during the 40 days there were other events during which the risen Christ could have given further details on the gospel command. There were two appearances in Jerusalem, two in Galilee (one by the Sea of Tiberias, one on the hilltop), and the meeting reported in Acts 1:1–14.

There are five events in the Gospels in which the Great Command is given: on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16–20), at a table (Mark 16:14–16), in the upper room (John 20:19–23), on the beach (John 21:15–17), and the moment just as He was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:6–9). What important points do all of these events teach us?

Under the power of the Holy Spirit and obeying the words of Jesus, the apostles (teachers; leaders) quickly spread across the Roman world. Paul preached on the northern shore of the Mediterranean; Philip worked in Samaria. Matthew traveled to Ethiopia and Thomas to India.

The apostles started out small and with much opposition. Through the power of the Lord these faithful followers were able to spread the gospel message to the world. Whatever faults, weaknesses, fears, doubts, and struggles they had, they accepted the call and worked for the salvation of the world. They shared with others what they learned about Jesus and what Jesus had done for them. Is that not what being a Christian should be all about?

What have you been given in Christ? How should God's gift to you through Christ influence your attitude (feeling) toward witness and mission to others?



Whatever their faults, weaknesses, doubts, or fears, the disciples accepted the call to spread the gospel around the world.

DEFINITIONS

2. evangelism—going from place to place to spread the gospel.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: According to Matthew, Jesus foretold that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony [witness] to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14, NIV). At the same time, the Bible makes another point clear: “ ‘But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only’ ” (Matthew 24:36). Note also Jesus’ words: “ ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority’ ” (Acts 1:7, NIV).

So, while the good news of the gospel has been preached and is being preached as never before, and while we believe that Christ’s coming is soon, we must not get caught up in dates and guessing about dates. “We are not to be guessing as to the times and the seasons which God has not shown. Jesus has told His disciples to ‘watch,’ but not for a certain time. Instead, Jesus’ followers are to be in the position of those who are listening for the orders of their Captain. They are to watch, wait, pray, and work, as they near the time for the coming of the Lord.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 189.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 The Bible makes clear the teaching on not setting dates for Christ’s return. But before long we hear something in the news about some group of Christians setting a date for Christ’s return. Why do you think people are stubborn about doing this, other than as a good fund-raising project? (After all, if Jesus is coming on June 19 of next year [or fill in any date you want], then what good is your money now?) Why is it bad for the Christian witness in the world when these dates, year after year, are shown to be false?
- 2 Think of the problems the early believers faced in the first few years of mission, especially when they were so small in number. What are some of the problems we face in mission today? What can we learn from the success of the early church that can help us to carry the gospel to the world?