

Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries

The Son of God Among Us

Lesson #4 for July 26, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 23; Mark 9:12; Luke 24:7; John 1:1-14,29; Hebrews 2:9.

1. This lesson is about Jesus Christ. Who was He? What difference does it make who He was? What was the main reason for His coming? Who did He associate with? Who did He condemn while here on earth?
2. The Bible does not leave us the option of believing that Jesus Christ was "just a good man."

A man who was merely a man and said the sorts of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a 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 Company, 1960), page 52. (See *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Sabbath Afternoon, July 19)

3. Our Bible study guide says:

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? (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Sabbath Afternoon, July 19)

God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. **His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant.** Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith. {*Steps to Christ* 105.2}

Should we just accept the opinions of others about whether or not the Bible is reliable? To what committee or even church are you willing to delegate such decisions on your behalf? Ellen White seemed to suggest that those who are real Christians will take the time and effort to evaluate such questions for themselves.

4. So, who was Jesus? What do you believe about Him? Why do you believe what you do believe? What was the purpose of His coming to earth?
5. What do you think about the following passage from our Bible study guide?

That He did great things while here is fine; that He preached powerful sermons is fine; that He revealed to us the character God is fine. But none of these things, in the end, really matter if Jesus did not come and die as a Substitute for us, thus giving each of us the promise of eternal life (if we but claim it for ourselves). (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Sunday, July 20)

6. Why is the death of Jesus so important to us? What does it add to our understanding of salvation and God? Do we think that it is more important to understand that Christ died for us? Or is it more

important that Christ died to answer the questions about God in the great controversy?

It was in order that the heavenly universe might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. **The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth.** By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God's government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped....Who is able to describe the last scenes of Christ's life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes?—The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels. *The Signs of the Times*, July 12, 1899 (4ST 44:1:2)

7. Do you agree with the following statement from our Bible study guide? "Because without Jesus and His death, the whole world and everything in it would come to nothing." (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Sunday, July 20)
8. Why do we choose to believe what the Bible says about Jesus?
9. There are many ways in which the life of Jesus impacts virtually everyone on earth, whether they know it or not. The "western world" primarily follows a calendar dating system that "on the surface" seems very strange. Our annual dates are supposedly counted from the birth of Christ; and prior to His birth, we have a counting system that goes backwards! Why is that? Muslims, Jews, Chinese, and other groups all have separate calendars which have a starting date and always move forward.
10. Is the life and death of Jesus important to us because He was the most wealthy person who ever lived? Because He had a very effective public relations team? Because He was a fantastic political leader? Why does His birth, His relatively short life, and His death matter to us who live about 2000 years later? Why do we believe that He was "more than human"?
11. Is it really possible for One Person to be fully God and fully man? Could such a Person live a truly human life? Do we need to accept all the biblical claims just "by faith"? Or is there a way to "check out" the evidence? If we do not accept the biblical account of creation and choose to believe in evolution instead, do the life and death of Jesus still matter to us?
12. In your own personal thinking, what are the major advantages and disadvantages of believing in the biblical account? What are the advantages and disadvantages of believing in the evolutionary account?
13. What separates Jesus from the great prophets and from the apostles of Scripture? Was He the greatest Teacher of all time? Ultimately, what difference do the life and death of Jesus make in your life today?
14. What evidence could you produce supporting the idea that Jesus is coming back? If He never comes back, do His life and death really matter?
15. Why was the life and death of Jesus such a contradiction to the beliefs of so many people in His day? Why did He associate with sinners, publicans, prostitutes, drunkards, gluttons, and other outcasts? If He was truly and fully God, what does His behavior say to us about God? What did He see in those people that made Him want to associate with them?
16. Read John 1:1-11. This is a series of amazing statements. Did John provide any evidence to support his claims? Or are those claims and statements beyond the capacity for proof or evidence?

Why do conservative Christians generally accept them? Read John 1:14,18. What do those two verses add? What convinced John of the truthfulness of all of those statements? Is the evidence which convinced John available to us today?

17. Considered superficially, we could say that Jesus condemned the “good people” and associated with the “bad people”! What kind of a person would do such a thing? We can understand that the “good people” were not really good people because of their hypocrisy. But what evidence do we have that the “bad people” were really “good” people? Were they “good” because they were willing to recognize their sinfulness and listen to and follow Jesus? What made them “good”?
18. Read Matthew 23. There is plenty of evidence—assuming we believe the words of Jesus—that the scribes and Pharisees had serious problems! What did Jesus accomplish by condemning them? Did He make them more ready to accept Him? Or did His words help to open the eyes of the “bad people” so that they would not “idolize” the “good people”?
19. Which of those two groups—the “good people” or the “bad people”—do you think you are the most like?
20. Is it easier for God to reach hypocrites or those who know and recognize that they are sinners?
21. If we made it a habit of associating with drunkards, prostitutes, and drug addicts, etc., how would people look at us today?
22. As a concluding point, our lesson points out that Jesus died for the worst of sinners, even for the hypocrites! “He never lost sight of His mission: to save the lost.” (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Thursday, July 24) Was that, in fact, His most important mission? What about answering the questions in the great controversy? What about proving that God is telling us the truth and that Satan is the liar?
23. **But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31,32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68,69 (1890); *Reflecting Christ* 60 (1985)**

Seventh-day Adventists need to look far beyond their own salvation to see the “larger,” universe-wide issues in the great controversy. If we understand those, then we can begin to understand our own position.

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