

Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries ***The Compassionate Savior***

Lesson #6 for August 9, 2008

Scriptures: John 1:14; John 3; John 4; John 9; Ephesians 4:32; 1 John 2:12.

1. This lesson is about the fantastic way in which Jesus understood and “felt” the needs of the people to whom He ministered. What was it that made Jesus so good at communicating? Was it His compassionate and unconditional love? His deep and thorough understanding of humanity? What did His divinity have to do with all of this?
2. Read Matthew 4:25 and Luke 6:17-19. Clearly, Jesus was the most exciting and interesting thing happening in Palestine in those days. Note that these texts are about Jesus ministry in “Gentile” territory; Jesus did not just work among the Jews. If one had been seriously ill, where would s/he have gone? Remember that people had to travel by foot or possibly by horse or donkey.
3. Why did people go to see Jesus? How many actually thought that He might be the Messiah? How many went just to see Him heal people? Some apparently went to see people like Lazarus for whom Jesus had performed marvelous miracles! How many went to Jesus specifically for the “spiritual food”?
4. Read Matthew 9:36. What is implied by the statement that the crowds were “without a shepherd”? There were many so-called religious leaders! Did any of them qualify as “shepherds”? Did the Jews not have “caring” religious leadership?
5. Have we individually experienced or manifested true compassion? When was the last time you did something for someone which “cost” you, but for which you did not expect to receive anything in return?
6. To what extent did the message that Jesus taught and demonstrated about His Father amaze and attract the crowds? Did they really understand what He was saying and showing? How many of the people really “heard” anything about God the Father? Or did the people just go for the miracles?
7. Think of the times when Jesus ministered to single individuals. (John 3; 4; 9) Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, and apparently requested to meet Jesus at night to avoid public association with Him. (John 3) By Jewish convention, Jesus “should not” have even had a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, especially considering her past history! (John 4) The man healed on Sabbath of his blindness did not even know who Jesus was, yet, Jesus healed him. (John 9) What characteristics of those individual conversations and interactions do you notice? On those occasions, people were individually “touched” by the words and personality of Jesus. They appeared to be very attracted. By contrast, what happened when Jesus drove the merchants and the moneychangers out of the temple on two different occasions? (John 2:13-17; Matt 21:12,13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45,46) It was not physical force that drove them out. So, what was it that drove them out? Apparently, Jesus just “looked” at and spoke to the merchants in the temple and they ran, “convicted” of their greed. (*Desire of Ages* 157-158)

Only Jews were allowed inside the courtyard of the temple; but the “Court of the Gentiles”—where the Gentiles were allowed to observe the temple services and learn about Yahweh—was just outside the Jewish area of the courtyard. As high priest, Caiaphas apparently

sanctioned the conversion of the “Court of the Gentiles” into a moneymaking area for the moneychangers and the sale of animals for sacrifice. Animals for sacrifice at the temple had to be declared by the priest to be without any defects. (See Exodus 12:5) If a pair of doves purchased outside the temple for a day’s wage was declared to be “with blemish,” then it could not be sacrificed. An “identical”—and perhaps the same animal at a later time—sold by the “temple-sanctioned” merchants inside the temple would cost 15-20 days wage. Only “temple coins” could be used to purchase these animals inside the temple grounds, and the moneychangers set the exchange rate. (See *Daily Study Bible* - John 2:12-16)

8. In Jesus’ day and in the following generation, His disciples and followers spread the gospel to the “then-known” world. What is it that gave—and still gives—the true gospel message its universal appeal? What was it about the message that the disciples took to the world that attracted all those people? Could you present the truth of the gospel to a Communist Chinese or to an Indian Hindu in a way that would make him want to know more about God? Mahatma Gandhi is quoted as saying, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”

The influence of the priests and the established religious organization was much greater in Jerusalem and Judea than in other areas of Palestine. Is that why all of the disciples except Judas were from Galilee? Were those from outside Judea more open to the change of paradigm in the message that Jesus preached than most of those from Judea? Are we influenced too much by the established religious organizations in our day?

9. Although Jesus calmed the storm that was about to destroy Him and all of His disciples, (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 4:38-41) we do not have evidence that Jesus ever had to deal with a major natural disaster during His lifetime. What would Jesus have done during hurricane Katrina? What would He have done during and after the Chinese earthquake? Are all those natural disasters indications that we are drawing nearer to the end of this earth’s history? (Matthew 24:7) How does God feel as hundreds, even thousands, of His children die in natural disasters? How does He reach out to those who believe that He is personally responsible for all those deaths?
10. In the Old Testament, God came down and “dwelt” among the children of Israel in the tent in the wilderness and later in the temples of Solomon and Herod. Today, we do not have a single building or place where we can go and expect to meet with God. Do you believe that God is with you on a day-by-day basis? What evidence would you cite to confirm that?
11. Look at the comment in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, August 5: “Considering the essence of Christian theology, that we are sinners in need of God’s forgiveness, no wonder it is such a powerful theme in Jesus’ life and teachings.” Do you agree with these words? Do you agree that the death of Jesus gives Him the right to “justly forgive” our sins? Do you agree that forgiveness is the essence of Christian theology? Has God been more forgiving after the death of Jesus than He was before?
12. There have been three main ways to “look at” salvation. 1) “If I do enough good works, God will save me.” This is an egocentric approach, a “focus on me.” 2) “I cannot save myself, but God wants to save me and God does the ‘work’ needed in/on me.” This is still a “focus on me.” 3) A “Larger View” that focuses on God suggests that the plan of salvation is about how God deals with questions raised about His own character and His own government and how He changes us if we let Him.

For those who wish to focus on righteousness by faith and its theological implications, there is often a great emphasis on the importance of forgiveness. They believe that forgiveness is the essence of justification. Furthermore, they believe that justification is the key to our salvation. No wonder they think that forgiveness is so important. Can we make the gospel attractive to people while preaching a “God-centric” message and without attracting them by “telling” them that salvation is “all about them.”

13. By contrast, some of us believe that God is, was, and always has been “forgiveness personified.” No one needed to do anything to convince God to be forgiving. The only one who has questioned God’s ability to forgive and His willingness to forgive is the Devil! The essence of the gospel is that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be! The emphasis on justification and forgiveness focuses our attention on our past behavior. That, in essence, causes us to focus on our sins. If “by beholding we become changed,” (*Great Controversy* 555) then that would have a disastrous result!
14. Our focus should be on Jesus and the wonderful truth that He has revealed about His Father. We should be so attracted by our study of all three Members of the Godhead that we would like nothing more than to become like Them. Our past behavior is a permanent part of history. Our history is not changed by being forgiven. While we are saved by faith, we are judged by our works. (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Rev. 20:13) We have sometimes suggested that “God forgives and forgets.” It is impossible for God to forget, i.e. to “put away” His omniscience. The common view of justification says terrible things about God! Anselm put it this way 900 years ago:

For what justice is there in giving up the most just [or righteous] man of all to death on behalf of the sinner? What man would not be judged worthy of condemnation if he condemned the innocent in order to free the guilty? . . . **For if he could not save sinners except by condemning the just, where is his omnipotence? But if he could, but would not, how are we to defend his wisdom and justice?** *Cur Deus Homo?* Anselm

Do you want to live for eternity with a “god” like that?

15. Christ’s life and death on this earth were for the purpose of telling the truth in the great controversy. He answered the questions and accusations that Satan had raised. Our salvation, while very important to us, was a relatively minor part of what He accomplished!

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 [as almost happened at the flood].** 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 par. 2,3 (4ST 44:1:2)

This small planet and its inhabitants are the “theater” to the universe—“a spectacle for the whole

world of angels and of human beings.” (1 Corinthians 4:9, *GNB*)

16. Nothing needed to happen to give God permission to forgive us! God’s attitude toward us has not changed one tiny bit because of the death of Jesus. We are the ones that changed as a result of “the cross” as we have “seen” God. We are the ones who have been changed by sin, not God. Jesus came to “deal with sin.” (Romans 8:3) We learn to be forgiving as we learn to become like Jesus. This is an essential part of the Christian message because it is a central characteristic of God Himself.
17. Consider the parable of the “lost” or “prodigal” son. (Luke 15:11-32) The father had been watching that road since the day his son left. He probably recognized the boy by the way he walked. As soon as he saw him, he went running to meet his son. That father’s heart had been “going out” to his son every day and his eyes were constantly on the road waiting for his son to come back. No speech was needed to convince him to start loving his son again!
18. In His daily work, Jesus used many examples from ordinary life. He did that so that whenever we would come across those same items or those same situations, we would be reminded of His teachings. That is an absolutely marvelous method of teaching. How can we follow that example of Jesus today? What items or circumstances in our experiences are common to hundreds or even thousands which could be used to illustrate points of the gospel?
19. During the Dark Ages, the “god” that was represented by the popular church in Europe came to be thought of as a fearsome deity—a “god” ready to punish at the slightest provocation. As scientists began to study the laws that control our earth, our lives, our biology, etc., they began to think that this earth operated on unchanging principles. That led some to promote the idea of *Deism*. *Deism* suggests that God set this earth in motion long ago; and after establishing the laws of its existence, has left us to “our own devices.” This was a welcome change from the picture being presented by the popular church of the day. But, it certainly does not accurately represent the God we worship.
20. Jesus was saddened when Philip asked, “Show us the Father.” (John 14:8) That must have been a real “shocker”—after almost His entire time here on this earth to have one of His closest associates ask a question that seemed to suggest that he had not heard anything that Jesus had said or seen anything which He had done! But the disciples had been influenced so much by the teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees that they could not bring themselves to believe that the human being they saw in front of them was, in fact, fully God.
21. Has the Seventh-day Adventist Church “dropped the ball” in that “we” are fairly successful at getting people “into” the church but we are very poor at keeping them “in” the church? Should we be “taking” new church members “straight” into extensive “book-by-book” study of the Bible with an emphasis on the “picture of God”? Would that “close” the “back door” of the church so that retention of members would be better? Jesus said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:16-20) Does that mean by retention of converts?
22. Could we reach the place where we correctly represent God to those around us? Do you know anyone who actually does that? If our goal is to be more like Jesus, why are so few of us doing it? Do we even have a fully correct “picture” of God? What distortions are a part of our understanding? What is the best way for us to get a clear and comprehensive picture of God? Do we need to read the Gospels on a regular basis? What about *Desire of Ages*? *Christ’s Object Lessons*? *Mount of Blessing*? *Ministry of Healing*? *Steps to Christ*? Is God willing to let Himself be “seen” by us and “through” us? How do we actually go about “reflecting His character”? Could we actually fulfill the statement of Jesus in Matthew 5:16?

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