

Worship

“Trust Not in Deceptive Words”: The Prophets and Worship

Lesson #9 for August 27, 2011

Scriptures: Micah 6:1-8; Isaiah 1:10-15; 6:1-8; 58:1-10; 44; Jeremiah 7:1-10.

1. This lesson is about what happens outside of the usual worship setting. It is not about what happens in church. Instead, it is about what happens all week long. What does that have to do with worship? Let us see if we can find out.
2. Read Micah 6:1-8; Hosea 6:4-6; Isaiah 1:10-15. What do you think of Isaiah’s first sermon? Why did God give those messages to those ancient prophets more than 700 years before Christ? What would such prophets have to say to the members of your Seventh-day Adventist church in 2011? (Revelation 3:14-22) Is religion only for the weekend? Or perhaps, even only for the church setting? The ancient Israelites seemed to think that so long as they attended the services at the temple and offered the right sacrifices, it did not matter what they did the rest of the time. And God responded that if what we do during the rest of the week is not correct, our worship is useless! How does all of this fit with the book of Leviticus? By the days of Jesus, literally thousands of people brought animals to be sacrificed. There were literally rivers of blood.
3. Does God care about what we do during the rest of the week? Do His records include a full and complete account of everything we do and think day and night all week long? (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Matthew 10:26; Romans 2:16; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Revelation 20:12,13) The ancient Israelites apparently deceived themselves into believing that they were okay. Are we deceiving ourselves? In what areas of our lives are we deceiving ourselves? Our beliefs only count if our actions are consistent with those beliefs. Does our salvation hinge on our secret thoughts? The investigative judgment will simply reveal—using God’s perfect 3D record-keeping system—what actually was thought, believed, and done.
4. The narrow way (Matthew 7:13,14) is often thought to be difficult, perhaps boring, and certainly not fun! Is that a true description? Or, is it actually healthier and better for us to live God’s way? God suggested to the ancient Israelites that He would offer them healthier, happier, holier lives. (Exodus 23:25,26) Is that really true? Who would not want that?
5. Is there a difference between what we profess to be and what we actually live out in our lives? If we worship the true God—at least as we perceive Him—in His sanctuary on the true Sabbath, shouldn’t that be enough? Are we asking, “What is the minimum that we can get by with?”
6. Christianity is unique in its teaching that salvation comes by grace alone. What does that really mean to you?
7. Only the death of Jesus credited to us by faith, only the righteousness of Christ, which He wrought out in His life, which is then given to all who truly accept it, can save the sinner. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sunday, August 21)
8. What does it mean to be “credited to us by faith”? Is it true that “...nothing less than the death of Christ could solve the problem created by sin”? (*ibid*) Why would that be true? What is it about the death of Christ that solves the sin problem? And what does that have to do with what we do and think all day long every day?
9. Two very different understandings of the death of Christ are possible. Did Jesus die primarily to pay the price for my sins—and it does not really matter if I understand how that works? Or,

did Jesus live and die to give us a choice: We can live the kind of life which He lived, or we will die the kind of death which He died—the direct result of sin? Remember the warning that God gave back in Genesis 2:17. If God is the only source of life and if we separate ourselves from God, we are separating ourselves from life. (Isaiah 59:2)

10. Micah, Isaiah, and Hosea suggest that instead of piling up offerings or doing things at church which we believe might give us credit, we need to do what is right, to be loving and kind, and to be willing to serve others. When we talk about doing what is right, what does that imply? Is that a case of God giving us a set of requirements for salvation, and we are doing our best to fulfill those requirements? Or, is doing what is right the same as doing what is actually best for us even in our lives here and now?
11. Which do you think is more important: Having a correct understanding of God, i.e., a correct theology? Or, doing what is right in His eyes, i.e., correct action? Does having a correct picture of God impact your actions? If not, why not? Have you ever met a so-called Christian who was nasty, arrogant, unkind, unsympathetic, and not even fun to be around? What has his theology done for him? Micah specifically suggested that we should act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Is that something that we practice on a daily basis? If our religion does not make a difference in our lives, of what use is it?
12. What do you think the angels of heaven thought as they watched the Israelites attending the temple on Sabbath and then going to the fertility cult religious sites the rest of the week? When the children of Israel went into Solomon's Temple and pretended to worship God, were they actually hoping to get finished as quickly as possible and get out of there?
13. As we have suggested in several previous lessons, the true worship of God means that we recognize God for who He is and respect and reverence Him for that reason. Could we do that on the weekends in church and still do all sorts of terrible things during the week?
14. Read Isaiah 1:11-15. Is it possible that things had become so bad in Israel that God was refusing to listen to their prayers? Was He turning away when they practiced their religious activities?
15. Read Isaiah 6:1-8. (Compare Ezekiel 1:26-2:1) What happened in these verses? Was Isaiah in the temple court when he had that vision? Did he, in effect, look through the holy place and right into the most holy place where he could see God Himself? If we get a correct and as complete as possible picture of God, are we in awe?
16. What would you do if God the Father suddenly showed up in your Sabbath school class? Would it be any different if the Person who showed up was Jesus? Or, the Holy Spirit? Would you respond as Isaiah did? As Ezekiel did? Or, as the children of Israel did at the foot of Mount Sinai? Do you respect God and reverence Him more because of His creative power? Because of the life and death of Christ here on this earth? Or, because of what He has specifically done for you in terms of salvation?
17. When he saw God, Isaiah thought of two things: 1) The Holiness of God and 2) His own sinfulness and unworthiness. How do you think you would respond if God appeared to you? How did Adam and Eve respond when God appeared to them and walked and talked with them in the cool of the evening in the Garden of Eden? How did Abraham respond when those three strangers walked down the dusty road to his home? (Genesis 18:1-5; Hebrews 13:2)
18. Are Christians you know, including yourself, daily and weekly actually becoming more like Jesus? If not, why not? Does this have anything to do with the long delay of His return? Would it make a difference if you knew that Jesus was coming back in one year? One

month?

You will not be able to say that He will come in one, two, or five years, neither are you to put off His coming by stating that it may not be for ten or twenty years.—*Review and Herald*, March 22, 1892. {Ev 221.1}

19. Do we actually practice living out what we believe? Is that easy to do? Or, difficult to do? If we give voice to our beliefs, does it cement them more clearly in our own minds? If you are not sure about the answer to this question, try teaching one of these Sabbath school classes!
20. Remember that in Matthew 28:19,20, Jesus Himself promised to be with us always. Do we act as if He is always present? Have you heard Christians talk about practicing the presence of God? What would that mean to you?
21. We need to remember that these passages in the Old Testament were written to “God’s chosen people.” (Exodus 19:5,6; Deuteronomy 4:20; Isaiah 43:20; 1 Peter 2:9) Many, if not most, of those people professed to be worshipers of *Yahweh*. Were they really?
22. We have often suggested that the very essence of Christianity means looking out for and serving others while the essence of the Devil’s side is selfishness. How does that fit with Jesus’ statement that we should take up our cross and follow Him? (Luke 9:23) Was Jesus trying to suggest to us that living a Christian life will always seem like we are carrying a heavy cross?
23. Is practicing Christianity supposed to be a burden? In Isaiah 6 it seems clear that God had a better understanding of the real condition of the people and even of Isaiah than they did themselves. Do you think that is true of us today? There are many verses in the Scripture suggesting that we are sinners. (1 Kings 8:46; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23) There is nothing that we individually can do to change that fact. So, where do we go from here?
24. The ancient Jewish rabbis had a list of 613 precepts that they believed were required by God’s law. Psalm 15 reduces those principles to 11. Isaiah 33:15 suggests that the number should be 6. Micah 6:8—which we have looked at already—sums them up into 3. Could all of those principles be summed up by the practice of true *agape* love?
25. The book of Ecclesiastes suggests that all is vanity. Solomon believed that he would be forgotten, and everything that he accomplished in his life would be forgotten. (Ecclesiastes 2:16) Is that the goal or the end that we are all headed for? Do you sometimes believe that your job has—or even your religious practices have—little meaning?
26. Read Isaiah 44. This chapter is a part of a larger section in Isaiah 40-55 in which the true God challenges all false gods to prove what they can do. Can they create? Can they predict the future far in advance? Or, are they just pieces of metal, stone, or wood that have to be nailed down to keep them from falling over? How foolish it seems to worship something that one made with his own hands! Are our idols any different? What about our houses? Our cars? Our bank accounts? If your picture of God has not changed in the last two years, you are worshipping a “graven image.”
27. Does attending the church service at your church seem not much different from attending a social club? Do you really believe that when you are in church, you are worshipping God? Do you get insights and ideas about how to serve God better and how to understand His character better through your Sabbath school class and your church services?
28. What does the Sabbath add to your understanding of God? Through the Scriptures we see that the Sabbath and true worship on Sabbath remind us of creation, (Exodus 20:8-11) of God’s freeing the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, (Deuteronomy 5:12-15) and of the redemption provided by Christ when He died and rested over the Sabbath before rising on

Sunday. The Sabbath will also be celebrated in the new earth. (Isaiah 66:23)

29. Christians talk about a revival and reformation. True repentance suggests godly sorrow for sin. It is not just sorrow for the consequences of sin. Reformation suggests that we will actually change our behavior. What would happen to us as individuals if we truly were being changed each day to become more like Jesus? (Matthew 5:16; 2 Corinthians 3:18) Would our associates at work notice? Would the people at church notice? Would our family notice? Hasn't the time come for us to take these things seriously?

Every man's work passes in review before God and is registered for faithfulness or unfaithfulness. Opposite each name in the books of heaven is entered with terrible exactness every wrong word, every selfish act, every unfulfilled duty, and every secret sin, with every artful dissembling. Heaven-sent warnings or reproofs neglected, wasted moments, unimproved opportunities, the influence exerted for good or for evil, with its far-reaching results, all are chronicled by the recording angel.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 482.

30. Read Jeremiah 7:1-10. Jeremiah lived about 130 years later than Isaiah. He lived through the final three conquests of Jerusalem including when Jerusalem was utterly and completely destroyed. But, right up until that time, people living in Jerusalem seemed to have the idea that God would never allow the beautiful temple of Solomon to be destroyed. So, if they stayed close to that temple or worshiped there on a regular basis, they believed that they would be protected as well.
31. Do we ever suggest that we should be protected because we are the "one true church"? Or, because we have accepted "the third angel's message"? Or, even because we "have the truth"? Is it more important that we have the truth or that the truth has us?
32. What are the main things that hinder us or prevent us from living the kind of Christian lives we know we should? How many times during each day do we say or do things that are slightly dishonest? When we go to work in the morning and we are feeling lousy and someone says: "Good morning. How are you?" do we say, "Fine"? Is that dishonest? Or, is that just a cultural norm?
33. In Isaiah's day, they were worshiping man-made idols. Do we ever turn even good things into idols in our day? If we are worshiping in a new church for which we have put forth considerable effort and expense to construct, do we take pride in it even suggesting that God should reward us for what we have done? Are we proud of our pastor?
34. How much of what we do on a weekly basis has no value whatsoever in terms of eternity? How many hours per week do we spend watching unprofitable television? Could those hours be better spent in careful Bible study learning more about God's government and the truth about His character? How about speaking to our friends and neighbors about God?
35. Those of us who espouse the great-controversy, larger-view, trust, healing model of the plan of salvation believe that the truth about God's character and government is our number one belief. Does that belief make a difference in the way we behave each day? Are we daily drawing nearer to the kingdom of God? Or, are we sliding further away?

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