

## **Discipleship**

### **Jesus and the Social Outcasts**

Lesson #7 for February 15, 2014

Scriptures: Matthew 21:28-32; John 8:1-11; Mark 5:1-20; John 4:5-32; Matthew 9:9-13.

1. Jesus spent much of His time working with social outcasts, the so-called “bottom dwellers” of society. This lesson will focus primarily on: 1) The woman taken in adultery as described in John 8; 2) The demon-possessed man/men as described in Mark 5 (and also Matthew 8 and Luke 8); 3) The Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar as described in John 4; and 4) Matthew’s feast as described in Matthew 9, Mark 2, and Luke 5.
2. In every society there are established hierarchies. At the top of the pyramid tend to be the wealthy and well-educated. In the middle echelon, there are the “ordinary” people. They are the good, moral, hard-working citizens who own businesses or have good jobs. At the bottom of the pyramid are the prostitutes, substance abusers, criminals, the homeless. In Jesus’s day the “bottom” included the lepers, the tax collectors, and even doctors! Doctors were included in this group because they were constantly dealing with illness, even dead bodies, and many unclean things.
3. Read Matthew 21:28-32 and Luke 15:1-10. Jesus pointed out two contrasting groups of people. Into which group do you more naturally fit? Those who say, “Yes, I will go,” but do not? Or, those who say, “No, I won’t go,” but eventually change their minds and do?
4. How do you explain the statement of Jesus as recorded in Luke 15 that “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent”? (Luke 15:7, *GNB*) Was He speaking only of the Pharisees and Sadducees of His day? They believed that because they were the Jewish elite, their salvation was guaranteed!
5. In Jesus’s day, the socially elite surely included the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. Among the millions of Jews in Palestine and scattered throughout the Mediterranean world of those days, there were only about 6000 Pharisees. (See Josephus – *Antiquities* 17:41-42) The number of Sadducees was much smaller. Why do you suppose those two groups particularly opposed Jesus’s ministry? Remember that the Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees. Did any of them ever respond to Jesus? (See Acts 6:7) We know about Simon, the former leper, who was the uncle of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. We know about Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. And, of course, there was Saul/Paul who responded to God on the road to Damascus. But, it is interesting to notice that quite a number of Pharisees later became Christians. (Acts 15:5) Unfortunately, apparently, they carried many of their Pharisaical ideas into their brand of Christianity!
6. How do you suppose the rest of the Jews—the social outcasts—felt as they associated with a rabbi? Did Jesus make any of them feel uncomfortable? How did Jesus become a rabbi?
7. Read Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-30; and John 8:1-11. Why did those Jewish leaders bring that woman to Jesus? Their only purpose in presenting her alone to Jesus was to trap Him and declare Him guilty of either: 1) Setting aside the law of Moses, or 2) Assuming the prerogatives that belonged to the Roman oppressors. Only the Romans were allowed to pronounce the death sentence on someone. It is interesting to note that those Jewish leaders claimed to have caught the woman “in the very act,” and the Mosaic law said very clearly that both the man and woman were to be stoned to death. But, where was the man who was involved?

8. In the days of Moses, Jesus had written the Ten Commandments with His finger on the tables of stone. But, in this story, He wrote the sins of those despicable men in the dust. A few footprints, a few puffs of wind and the record would be gone. Imagine if Jesus had written their sins into the stones of the temple courtyard. Wouldn't that be the biggest tourist attraction in Jerusalem?

9. In John 8:8, we notice that the men left, slinking away beginning with the eldest. (See also *Desire of Ages* pp. 460-462 and *Ministry of Healing* 86-89) Ellen White in *Ministry of Healing* said:

This was to her the beginning of a new life, a life of purity and peace, devoted to God. In the uplifting of this fallen soul, Jesus performed a greater miracle than in healing the most grievous physical disease; He cured the spiritual malady which is unto death everlasting. **This penitent woman became one of His most steadfast followers.** With self-sacrificing love and devotion she showed her gratitude for His forgiving mercy. For this erring woman the world had only contempt and scorn, but the Sinless One pitied her weakness and reached to her a helping hand. While the hypocritical Pharisees denounced, Jesus bade her, "Go, and sin no more." (*MH* 89.2)

10. Could that have been Mary Magdalene? When Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone," the woman was sure that she was about to die. But, the only person present without sin was Jesus; He threw no stone but gave her good advice.

11. In another story, Jesus had spent a long day preaching to the people along the seashore near Capernaum. (See Mark 4 and Matthew 13) After that long day, He was very tired. When He got into the boat to go across the sea, He fell asleep at the back of the boat. There were other boats available, and people crowded into them to follow Jesus and His disciples. When they got on the lake, a terrible storm arose. They all thought they were going to die. Then, they remembered Jesus who had told them to make this journey. They found Him sleeping. They woke Him up; whereupon, He calmed the storm! (See Mark 4:35-41; Matthew 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25) Early the next morning, they arrived on the opposite shore.

12. Read Mark 5:1-20; *Ministry of Healing* 95-99; and *Great Controversy* 514-515. They apparently drew their boats up on the shore near a cemetery inhabited by one man (Mark and Luke) or two men (Matthew) possessed of many evil spirits. (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39) It is interesting to notice the sequence of events that took place: **1)** Jesus preached all day at Capernaum. **2)** He went to sleep in the bottom of the boat. **3)** He awoke and calmed the storm. **4)** When they landed on the shore, He was attacked by two demon-possessed men. As the disciples ran, Jesus stood His ground in a personal power struggle with the Devil himself. No doubt, the Devil was furious that he had not been able to drown Jesus the night before. (We may not clearly understand demon possession.)

Evil spirits, in the beginning created sinless, were equal in nature, power, and glory with the holy beings that are now God's messengers. But fallen through sin, they are leagued together for the dishonor of God and the destruction of men. United with Satan in his rebellion, and with him cast out from heaven, they have, through all succeeding ages, co-operated with him in his warfare against the divine authority. We are told in Scripture of their confederacy and government, of their various orders, of their intelligence and subtlety, and of their malicious designs against the peace and happiness of men. (*GC* 513.2)

**5)** Jesus cast the thousands of demons from the men into the two thousand pigs which ran

over the cliff and drowned in the Sea of Galilee. **6)** A short time later, fearing further financial loss, the populace came out and asked Jesus to leave.

But the purposes of Christ were not thwarted. He allowed the evil spirits to destroy the herd of swine as a rebuke to those Jews who were raising these unclean beasts for the sake of gain. Had not Christ restrained the demons, they would have plunged into the sea, not only the swine, but also their keepers and owners. The preservation of both the keepers and the owners was due alone to His power, mercifully exercised for their deliverance. (*Great Controversy* 515.1)

**7)** Jesus told the two formerly-demon-possessed men who wanted to go with Him to stay behind and tell their stories in Decapolis. (What would they have done among the Jews in Galilee?) **8)** Sometime later when Jesus returned to Decapolis, thousands who had heard the formerly-demon-possessed men's stories came out to see Jesus and stayed with Him for three days after which He fed them all—4000 men plus women and children. (Mark 8:1-10; Matthew 15:32-39; *DA* 404) Once again, Satan was defeated as hundreds were healed; and, no doubt, thousands were convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah!

13. Read John 4:5-32. It is interesting to note that, as described in John 3, Jesus spoke to one of the elite Jewish Pharisees in secret at night. In John 4, He openly spoke to a social-outcast Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar in the middle of the day. According to Jewish custom, He was not to speak to Samaritans unless absolutely necessary. As a man who was not related to her, He was not supposed to speak to that woman, and He certainly was not supposed to drink from the same cups or pitchers from which she drank. (*DA* 183.2) Instead of beginning to preach to her about her sins, He asked for a cup of water. That led to the famous conversation in which eventually He said, "Go, call your husband." When she claimed that she did not have a husband, He proved His prophetic ability by revealing that she had had five! The woman tried to change the conversation by entering into a theological discussion. When she mentioned the Messiah, for the first time that we know about, Jesus said, "I am He." (*DA* 190.2-3) The woman left her water jar behind and raced into town to become the first person to announce the arrival of the Messiah or Christ.
14. Did Jesus ever get His cup of water? Why didn't He want the food that the disciples brought? Did He finally take some? What was the harvest that He was talking about which was already ripe? (John 4:35)
15. Read Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; and Luke 5:27-32. Matthew had been one of the foremost tax collectors for the village of Capernaum. Capernaum was at a major crossroad with traffic going east-west and north-south. No doubt, the tax collectors there were quite wealthy. Do you think Jesus's other followers were happy to have Matthew join them?
16. Of course, Matthew was delighted to follow Jesus. He left everything. Soon, he prepared a feast and invited many social outcasts to his feast. Of course, the Pharisees were appalled that a so-called Jewish Rabbi was eating with publicans and sinners and other social outcasts. And how did Jesus respond? In Matthew 12:7, He quoted from Hosea 6:6 which says: "I want your constant love, not your animal sacrifices. I would rather have my people know me than burn offerings to me." (*GNB*)

The Pharisees beheld Christ sitting and eating with publicans and sinners. He was calm and self-possessed, kind, courteous, and friendly; and while they could not but admire the picture presented, it was so unlike their own course of action, they could not endure the sight. The haughty Pharisees exalted themselves, and disparaged those who had not been blessed with

such privileges and light as they themselves had had. They hated and despised the publicans and sinners. Yet in the sight of God their guilt was the greater. Heaven's light was flashing across their pathway, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it"; but they had spurned the gift. Turning to the disciples of Christ they said, "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" By this question they hoped to arouse the prejudice which they knew had existed in the minds of the disciples, and thus shake their weak faith. They aimed their arrows where they would be most likely to bruise and wound. (5Bible Commentary 1088.3)

17. So, how did Jesus feel about associating with sinners and social outcasts?

It was the outcast, the publican and sinner, the despised of the nations, that Christ called and by His loving-kindness compelled to come unto Him. The one class that He would never countenance was those who stood apart in their self-esteem and looked down upon others. . . . (MH 164.2)

The fallen must be led to feel that it is not too late for them to be men. Christ honored man with His confidence and thus placed him on his honor. Even those who had fallen the lowest He treated with respect. It was a continual pain to Christ to be brought into contact with enmity, depravity, and impurity; but never did He utter one expression to show that His sensibilities were shocked or His refined tastes offended. Whatever the evil habits, the strong prejudices, or the overbearing passions of human beings, He met them all with pitying tenderness. As we partake of His Spirit, we shall regard all men as brethren, with similar temptations and trials, often falling and struggling to rise again, battling with discouragements and difficulties, craving sympathy and help. Then we shall meet them in such a way as not to discourage or repel them, but to awaken hope in their hearts. (MH 165.1)

18. How well are we doing at reaching people in social strata different from our own? Do we feel so uncomfortable that we cannot minister to them?
19. Think of some of the social outcasts in our day: homeless people, drug addicts, high school dropouts, prostitutes, mentally-disturbed people, illegal immigrants, beggars, and pregnant teens. What is our natural response when we come in contact with these people? Do we immediately put up barriers?
20. Try to imagine yourself as one of those people. Where would you live? How would you get money to survive? Would you trust anyone? How do you think you would be treated by other people? Would you feel comfortable going to your church? How would you try to get out of your problems and find a better way of life?
21. Try to insert yourself into each of these Bible stories. What would you have done? Do you think Jesus made intentional efforts to break down social barriers in His day? If we are to follow Jesus, should we be trying to do the same? What is the best way to do that?

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