

Discipleship

Discipling the Powerful

Lesson #9 for March 1, 2014

Scriptures: Romans 13:1-7; Mark 2:23-28; Matthew 8:5-13; 26:57-68; 27:11-14; Acts 4:1-13.

1. This lesson deals with people in positions of political and religious power. Is the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America really important? Try to imagine what it must have been like to be a member of the Sanhedrin during those seven years from the time of the baptism of Jesus in A.D. 27 until the stoning of Stephen in A.D. 34. (Consider Acts 6:7; 15:5.) What can we learn from the examples in this lesson about how to witness to people in powerful positions?
2. How would you describe the government under which Jesus ministered? It was supposed to be a theocracy with God in charge. But, during those days, it was ruled by the Sanhedrin which was a mixture of Pharisees and Sadducees. Of course, the Roman government was ultimately in charge.
3. Read Romans 13:1-7. What are we supposed to learn from these verses? Surely, we are not supposed to believe that Nero, Domitian, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, and Idi Amin were placed in those positions by God. Paul had an interesting relationship with the Roman government. At times, he was on trial before them; at other times, he was protected by being a Roman citizen. Should we take advantage of our citizenship when it is appropriate?
4. The United States of America is famous for being the first government to be established with a separation of powers of the church and the state. At all times, the church was/is supposed to be separate and distinct from government authority. But, today, we see more and more interaction between church and state. Is democracy the best form of government? Winston Churchill is famous for having said, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." (From the House of Commons speech on November 11, 1947)
5. Certainly, Paul was suggesting that we need to respect government. We need to pay our taxes, and we need to recognize that the government exerts power and that it can exercise it within certain limits. There were certainly pressures and brutality used in the Roman Empire in Paul's day.
6. Do we have any examples of civil disobedience in the life of Christ? How often did He intentionally oppose the Sanhedrin? Well, at least twice He cleared out the marketplace in the courtyard of the temple. (John 2:13-21; Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46) He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and chased out the animals.

The people of God will recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment and will teach obedience to it as a sacred duty within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, the word of God must be recognized as above all human legislation. "Thus saith the Lord" is not to be set aside for Thus saith the church or the state. The crown of Christ is to be uplifted above the diadems of earthly potentates. (6 *Testimonies* 402.1)

7. How would you describe the conversation between Jesus and the Sanhedrin in John 8? Why do you think that Jesus three times claimed to be God (John 8:24,28,58) while in the same conversation His enemies accused Him of being a Samaritan and of being demon-

possessed? Jesus responded by saying they came from their father the Devil. (John 8:44; contrast John 8:48,52.) What do you think was accomplished by that exchange? Is that how we should relate to authority?

8. The *Bible Study Guide* suggests that “even in His encounters with them, Jesus always sought to be redemptive.” Does John 8 sound like He was trying to be redemptive?
9. Read Mark 2:23-28 and Matthew 12:1-8. How do we respond when the obvious answer is not the answer we are expecting or want? What are we supposed to learn from this exchange? It is very clear from the Gospels that virtually everywhere Jesus went the Pharisees especially were following Him, looking for a chance to catch Him and accuse Him. It was their hope to discredit Him in the eyes of the people and then condemn Him to death.
10. Why did Jesus talk about David’s eating of the shewbread which was supposed to be eaten only by the priests? Beyond the fact that he and his men were hungry and they needed something to eat, there were other implications in that story. David had been anointed king of Israel. The priests recognized him as their future king and were loyal to him. Saul found out about it and murdered 85 of those priests. (1 Samuel 22:18) In this passage, Jesus was saying that Someone was there who had been anointed as Messiah but had not yet been enthroned. His situation was exactly parallel to David’s. And as such, He was and is Lord of the Sabbath.
11. Read Mark 3:1-6. What do you suppose the Pharisees thought about that exchange? The arguments Jesus proposed were virtually unanswerable. According to Jewish law, it was all right to relieve or help someone in an acute situation or an emergency even on the Sabbath. But, it was not acceptable to relieve a chronic condition on the Sabbath. Certainly, the case of this man with the paralyzed or withered hand could not be construed to be an emergency. Notice that Jesus did not go through any elaborate process of healing him but simply said, “Stretch out your hand.” Surely, everyone in that synagogue should have been rejoicing at that healing. And the fact that most of the people were rejoicing probably made the Pharisees even angrier.
12. Read Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. According to Jewish law, Jesus would not have been allowed to enter the Centurion’s house. This Roman realized that no one except Jesus could help his servant. In this story, Jesus was dealing with a Roman centurion—a man with considerable military power and authority. Another Roman centurion, Cornelius by name, is mentioned in Scripture in Acts 10. It is interesting to notice that in both cases those centurions recognized the superiority of the Jewish faith, and they were the ones who themselves went seeking help. No one had specifically reached out to them.
13. Why do you suppose the Roman centurion did not ask Jesus to come to his house and heal his servant? Did he recognize that as a Jew Jesus was not supposed to be in his house? Jesus was quite amazed at his recognizing that Jesus could simply speak the words at some distance and his servant would be well. Based on this story, would you say that the centurion had become a Christian? On what did he base his trust and faith in Jesus Christ? Were these powerful people trained to think for themselves?
14. Have we as Seventh-day Adventists become somewhat like the ancient Jews? Do we sometimes like to say that we have the truth instead of saying that the truth has us? Do we believe that the 28 doctrines are going to save us?
15. Have you ever been acquainted with a new convert to the church who seemed to be on fire for God, telling others and bringing others into the church? Why aren’t all our members

doing that? Have we become complacent? Do we act like the church is a club instead of a hospital for sinners? Are there people in our day like that Roman centurion who are reaching out and who are seeking a deeper knowledge of God that we could help if we were paying attention?

16. One of the most troublesome interchanges recorded in Scriptures regarding Jesus and the religious leaders was during His final trial. He went before Annas, Caiaphas, the full Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, and then Pilate again. During most of that time, Jesus said almost nothing. Why was that? In her extensive commentary on those experiences in *Desire of Ages*, Ellen White implied that His silence was a greater rebuke to most of those power-intoxicated individuals than it would have been if He had rebuked them openly.
17. Do we have any idea how many of the members of the Sanhedrin who were there during the trial of Jesus eventually became Christians? Read Acts 6:7 and 15:5. Who were the priests mentioned in Acts 6:7? Who were the Pharisees mentioned in Acts 15:5? Did all the priests belong to the group of the Sadducees? Some of them must have been not only listening but also learning. How many of them saw reasons to believe in Jesus at that time? There followed the darkness at Jesus's death, the earthquake, then His resurrection. Ellen White says that there were people who did not sleep that weekend because they were searching the Scriptures to see if Jesus was indeed the Messiah. (*DA 775.1*)
18. If someone had done an evaluation of the Christian church at the time of the death of Jesus, it might have seemed hopeless. But, everything changed 50 days later at the time of the Pentecost. What happened between those two events? Of course, Jesus rose from the dead. Was that the major impetus for the changes? Were there hundreds or maybe even thousands of people who had benefitted from the healing ministry of Jesus or who had been convinced by His life and His speeches who were still sitting on the fence for fear of the Jewish leaders until the experience at Pentecost?
19. There are many parallels between the experience of Jesus and the experience of Paul. Paul was beaten by Jews and Romans. He was shipwrecked several times. He was in dangers of many sorts. See 2 Corinthians 11:21-29. But, to the best of his ability, Paul continued to witness even while in chains. Remember that Paul had been a member of the Sanhedrin!
20. We must recognize that people do not often suddenly become converted. Usually, there is a long period of time when they are considering their options and thinking about what they want to do with their lives before they apparently have a sudden conversion.

It is by no casual, accidental touch that wealthy, world-loving, world-worshipping souls can be drawn to Christ. These persons are often the most difficult of access. Personal effort must be put forth for them by men and women imbued with the missionary spirit, those who will not fail or be discouraged.

Some are especially fitted to work for the higher classes. (*Ministry of Healing* p. 213.3-4)
21. In our day, what kind of people are best situated to witness to the powerful in business and political positions?
22. Before we open our mouths, do we need to consider the context and the experience of those to whom we witness? We should not be afraid to witness; but, we should be skilled at witnessing to each person in an appropriate way in light of their own background.
23. Most important of all, before we witness to others, we ourselves must have a clear

understanding of the gospel. If we are comfortable with our position and our relationship with Jesus Christ, it is much easier for us to witness to others. This does not mean that we need to know all of the answers. If we do not know the answer to something, we should be honest and say so. Or, we can say that we will try to find the answer.

24. Some people are naturally outgoing and are ready to talk to almost anyone about almost anything. Others are much more reticent.
25. What is the reputation of your church among those in your community? Is your church known for certain things? Is it recognized for any public benefit programs in which it is involved? If in getting involved in some community benefit programs we have an opportunity to witness to business or political leaders, we should accept that challenge. We should not expect that a single encounter is going to change their lives. Just as Jesus continued planting seed, we need to do the same. Eventually, the time for harvest will come. We should not become discouraged even though we might recognize that many will not respond the way we might wish.
26. We live in a culture that is enamored with celebrities. Professional athletes, movie stars, politicians, and performers of various kinds seem to be always in the spotlight. If we come into contact with some of those people, we might be reluctant to speak up. But, we need to remember that every person—no matter what his financial or political position might be today—will one day face the judgment.
27. Think of the stories of Joseph and Daniel. They were two young men whose lives changed dramatically while they were still very young. They served God as well as enemy governments admirably to the advantage of a lot of people. Should we expect Adventists to serve in those kinds of positions in our day? The Prime Minister of Uganda was a Seventh-day Adventist. Some Adventists have served in prominent positions in the governments of nations in the Caribbean. Jerry Pettis was a senior United States Congressman.
28. Should we take social action and through our voting rights hold public officials accountable for what they do? As we approach the end of this earth's history, what should be the relationship between church members and the government? How would you identify a political or business-wise seeker that might be like the Roman centurion in Jesus's day? How would you reach them and not just seem to be another status seeker or hanger-on in their retinue?
29. The day is coming when Christians will be called before judges and examined. There will be descriptions of those statements in the public press and television. We are told that we might have to stand singly and alone! (5T 707.2) If we have had some experience in dealing with political or business leaders in the past, might that make it easier for us to speak up when that time comes? If you have an opportunity to speak to some powerful person, should you begin by talking about some of our most distinctive doctrines? Or, is it best to let God guide you in what you say while being ready to talk in all areas? The day is certainly coming when we will be no more appreciated than were the Christians in the days of the disciples. Are we prepared?

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