

The Teachings of Jesus

Salvation

Lesson #4 for July 26, 2014

Scriptures: Luke 15:3-10; 18:9-14; John 6:35,44,47-51; 8:34-36; Matthew 20:28.

1. The great controversy is a war of ideas between a loving, truth-telling God and a lying, deceitful usurper, named Satan, who wants us just to relax and continue in our sins. What he does not want us to know is that for each one of us, it is also a choice between life and death. None of us has to die the second death. As promised in that most famous verse, John 3:16, God has come to this one rebel planet to seek and save lost sinners. He sent His Son, Jesus—the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Yeshua* or Joshua which means “*Yahweh* saves” or “*Yahweh* heals”—to save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)
2. **We cannot do anything about our past sins.** God is always willing and eager to forgive us our sins if we turn to Him. “For sin pays its wage—death; but God’s free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23, *GNB*) Those who refuse to give up their sinful past will be destroyed with their sins. This is a *result* of their sins and not a *punishment* for their sins. But, for everyone who is willing to leave his sins behind, God offers the most generous salvation. We must be willing to give up and stop our past sins!
3. First John 4:8,16 tell us that “God is love.” The Greek word *agapao* there translated as *love* means a deep and unrelenting care and concern for all His sinful children, none of whom deserve it. This is not a feeling on God’s part. It is not a whim or an emotional response. It is a basic principled reaction necessitated by God’s very nature of love. Thus, God gave us a gift that is beyond our comprehension, the most precious gift possible, Himself.
4. And how have we as a race of human beings responded? Read Luke 18:9-14. Try to imagine how this parable about the Pharisee and the publican or tax collector—which was probably based on a true story—affected the people who originally heard it. They knew that Pharisees were saints! And they knew that tax collectors were sinners! How could the tax collector be the recipient of God’s forgiveness and the Pharisee not receive God’s forgiveness? Surely, that was an unjust outcome! It tells us that we cannot buy or earn salvation in any way; it is a free gift. We can only receive it.
5. If God gave us what we deserve, what would it be? The only thing we could possibly earn by our sinful behaviors is a place in the lake of fire! (Revelation 20:14-15)
6. Fortunately for us, God has done everything possible to prevent that. He has taken the initiative and sent His Son to teach us the truth about sin, death, and especially about Himself and the Father. (John 7:28; 8:29; 12:49)
7. As we learned in our last lesson, all three Members of the Godhead are doing Their best to save us and to convince us of the rightness of Their cause. (Romans 8:26-39) God will weep as Satan and the wicked perish! (See *1SP* 29.2; *SR* 26:1; *EW* 146.1; *1SG*18.1.)
8. Read 1 John 4:10. What does this verse mean to you? What does it mean to say that God loved us and sent His Son to be “the means by which our sins are forgiven.” (*GNB*) Compare Romans 8:3. Did Jesus come to pay some kind of debt that we cannot pay? Is the Father demanding a payment for our sins? If God is not demanding the payment, who is? Luke 19:10 (*NKJV*) tells us that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” John 12:32 says that when we come to understand the purpose of His death on the cross, it attracts us to Him in a way that nothing else could.
9. Read Luke 15:3-10. What did these two individuals do when they realized they had lost

something of value? They sought for it until they found it. Is that a fair representation of what God does in seeking for us?

No sooner does the sheep go astray than the shepherd is filled with grief and anxiety. He counts and recounts the flock. When he is sure that one sheep is lost, he slumbers not. He leaves the ninety and nine within the fold, and goes in search of the straying sheep. The darker and more tempestuous the night and the more perilous the way, the greater is the shepherd's anxiety and the more earnest his search. He makes every effort to find that one lost sheep.

With what relief he hears in the distance its first faint cry. Following the sound, he climbs the steepest heights, he goes to the very edge of the precipice, at the risk of his own life. Thus he searches, while the cry, growing fainter, tells him that his sheep is ready to die. At last his effort is rewarded; the lost is found.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 188.

Both the sheep and the coin were lost. The sheep knew it was lost but could not find its way back. The coin had no knowledge that it was lost. The Owner worked to get both back.

10. So, what did Jesus have to do to save us? Was His death really required? Couldn't God have shown His love for us in some less "expensive" way?

John the Baptist described Jesus as " 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' " (*John 1:29, NKJV*). This image was easy for any Israelite familiar with the sacrifices offered in the temple and the sacred history recorded in the Old Testament to understand. Abraham had revealed his faith that " 'God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering' " (*NKJV*); and the Lord did provide the animal to be sacrificed in place of Isaac (*Gen. 22:8, 13*). In Egypt, a lamb was slain by the Israelites as a symbol of their divine deliverance from the bondage of sin (*Exod. 12:1-13*). Later, when the sanctuary service was established, two lambs were to be sacrificed on the altar each day, continuously: one in the morning and the other at twilight (*Exod. 29:38, 39*). All these sacrifices were symbols of the coming Messiah, who "was led as a lamb to the slaughter" because "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (*Isa. 53:6, 7, NKJV*). Therefore, by introducing Jesus as " 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' " (*John 1:29, NKJV*), John the Baptist was revealing the vicarious nature of Christ's atoning death. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, July 22.)

11. What is the meaning of "the vicarious nature of Christ's atoning death"? Does this suggest that God the Father is demanding that someone must die to "pay the price of sin"? No! God loved the world so much He gave His Son. See John 3:16.
12. Did the disciples understand the necessity for Jesus's death? (Matthew 16:22; Luke 18:31-34) They were certain that Jesus was going to become king and drive out the Romans! Jesus repeatedly tried to explain to His disciples that His death was necessary. See Matthew 20:28; John 10:11. Compare John 15:13. What did it mean for Jesus to say: "This is my blood, which seals God's covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28, *GNB*) What does blood have to do with the forgiveness of sins?
13. We need to be clear that no one demanded Christ's death. In John 10:18 (*GNB*), Jesus said: "No one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father has commanded me to do." The death of Jesus was absolutely necessary to show us the results of sin—the second death. **God is pleading with us not to die that death.**

14. Do we really understand why Jesus had to die? Are we grateful for what He did? Do we understand the truths represented by His life and death?
15. Read Luke 4:18 and John 8:34-36. Are we really slaves? How does the Son set us free? Jesus's original audience believed that they had an inside track to salvation with a guaranteed result because they were descendants of Abraham. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, do we sometimes believe that we have a free ride into the kingdom? Are we saved by our doctrinal knowledge? Personal godliness? Or, maybe by our record of service for God? Don't we have the truth?
16. It is only by clearly understanding the truth about God's character and His government as demonstrated by the life and death of Jesus that we have an opportunity to be saved.
17. On several occasions, Jesus stirred up a great deal of controversy by forgiving people's sins. Read Mark 2:1-12. Compare the story in Luke 7:37-48.
18. Does God have any trouble forgiving sins? Read Luke 23:34. Jesus forgave the men who were crucifying Him!

Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. "With His stripes we are healed." [Isaiah 53:5, *KJV*] (*The Desire of Ages* 25.2) [Content in brackets is added.]

19. How do you understand that paragraph? Does the death of Jesus teach us something important about the results of sin? What would happen to one of us if we became separated from God, the only Source of life? We would die immediately! The life and death of Jesus give us a choice. We can choose to live the kind of life which He lived; or, we will die the kind of death which He died. (See *DA* 753.1.) We can align ourselves with God's side, accepting the offer of all three Members of the Godhead to assist us; (Romans 8:26-39) or, we can continue in our selfish, self-indulgent ways and by default choose Satan's side and die the death which Jesus died and end up in the lake of fire.
20. But, the promises of Jesus are far more than just eternal life in the future kingdom. He promises us salvation now! "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36, *GNB*) He also said we have already "passed from death to life." (John 5:24, *GNB*)
21. Read John 10:10. Jesus assured us that He came in order that we "might have life—life in all its fullness." (*GNB*) Jesus has promised us freedom from the condemnation of sin now!
22. What other metaphors did Jesus use to try to describe His role in the plan of salvation? Read John 6:35,47-51. Jesus is the bread of life. What happens to bread? We consume it, and it becomes a part of us. Jesus is asking us to intellectually "consume" the truths of Scripture, and it will change us.

He who beholds the Saviour's matchless love will be elevated in thought, purified in heart, transformed in character. He will go forth to be a light to the world, to reflect in some degree this mysterious love. The more we contemplate the cross of Christ, the more fully shall we adopt the language of the apostle when he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Gal. 6:14.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 661.

23. With all of these promises ringing in our ears and with God's gracious offers before us, is there anything we still need to do? Read Matthew 6:33 and Luke 13:24. Do we need to "seek

the kingdom of God and His righteousness” even “striving to enter through the narrow gate”? Doesn't that seem like a contradiction?

24. Do we clearly understand how the life and death of Jesus reveal not only God's justice but also His mercy? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* suggests that sin is so “bad” “that only the death of Jesus could atone for it.” (Friday, July 25) What does that mean? Did the Father offer His Son, sending Him to this world and then turn around and demand His death to appease His own wrath as some suggest?
25. Why do so many Christians love to claim God's forgiveness and then feel free to go back and commit the same sins again? Is that God's intent? Or, is God's forgiveness supposed to lead us to a changed life? Does salvation include a transformation and not just a redemption? How much is included in God's salvation? How does it save us from the results of sin? How do you understand the following words from the *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 49-50?

Parents who bury their children experience incomparable agony. Our heavenly Father willingly sacrificed His only Child, watching, seemingly helpless, as Christ collapsed beneath the weight of humanity's accumulated transgressions and that splintered cross. God witnessed that thorny crown driven through weathered flesh until blood, gushing downward, painted Christ's body crimson. Ridiculing soldiers—crude, unworthy, uncouth specimens—mocked their Savior mercilessly. Self-righteous religious leaders shouted, “Crucify Him!” Compliant governmental officials, milquetoasts, abandoned Jesus. Earthly disciples scattered everywhere. When Christ petitioned His Father, silence enshrouded Him. Could despair have pierced with greater fierceness? Thousands of weeping angels waited anxiously, prepared to obliterate heaven's enemies. Overwrought with grief, they stared elsewhere, unable to understand why Jesus, their esteemed Commander, could not receive their assistance. Abandonment by fickle politicians, jaded religionists, and weak-willed disciples was one thing; but His Father, too, asleep when greatly needed? Why should Jesus die for these rebellious priests, these unappreciative followers, these cowardly politicians, and those ignorant masses beyond? Sunset approached, marking the completion of Jesus' agonizing final minutes. Momentarily His naked corpse would be wrestled away from the cross, ripping His flesh, furthering His disfigurement. Only Joseph, from Arimathea, and Nicodemus, from Jerusalem, spared Christ the indignity of an unmarked criminal burial. Such was the redemptive price for our transgressions.

How tragically ironic that many believers consider salvation an entitlement. Such heady overconfidence! They reason that because God promised salvation, they *deserve* salvation. How this attitude betrays the shallowness of cheap grace. Unworthy sinful mortals mortgaging the universe's Creator! Heaven's balance sheet states otherwise. Humankind stands eternally indebted, completely without merit, and helplessly diseased apart from God. Christ owes nothing. Sinful humanity owes everything.

26. How does that make you feel? Will we ignore or spurn such a demonstration? Will God's greatest Gift be wasted on us?

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