

# ***Biblical Missionaries***

## ***Must the Whole World Hear?***

Lesson #13 for September 26, 2015

Scriptures: Acts 4:12-13; Psalm 87:4-6; John 10:16; 14:6; Romans 1:18; 2:12-16; 16:25-27.

1. This series of lessons has focused on the role of Christians in witnessing to others. We have noted how people in a variety of circumstances have been able to witness to those around them. God could have used angels, and they certainly would have done a better job. So, why didn't He? One reason is because we need the experience of witnessing to others. The best way to understand a topic is to try to teach it to others. If you are not sure of that, ask a teacher! Do we know how to witness correctly?
2. Unfortunately, a large majority of those who have lived on this earth over the millennia have never heard of the gospel of God's grace as revealed in Jesus Christ. How will God treat those people? How can He be fair to them? Is it possible for people to be saved without hearing of the plan of salvation as it is in Jesus?
3. This is a question that has led to many, many long discussions among Christians and theologians. It is sometimes labeled as the question of "special revelation" versus "general revelation." Do we need to know the details of the gospel message as presented in Scripture in order to be saved? Or, is there enough information in the world around us that if we take it seriously and learn from it, we could be saved without knowing the gospel message?
4. There are those who claim that it is impossible to be saved unless you hear, understand, and accept the message as taught by one particular Christian denomination. On the other extreme, there are those who believe that all religions are equal, and one can take any path s/he likes to salvation. Do we as Seventh-day Adventists really believe that one must be an Adventist in order to be saved?
5. There is much evidence in Scripture that God wants as many people as possible to be saved. Revelation 15:3 states clearly that when all things come to a conclusion, the citizens of heaven will say: "Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!" (NASB 1995) Why isn't it possible to save everyone? Many who have rebelled on this earth would just start the great controversy all over again in heaven if they are given the chance! Or, is it that the arguments for God are not persuasive enough? How does it impact you to choose for or against God?
6. Do you know some Christians who believe that one must belong to their particular belief system in order to be saved? Are there other people who believe that one must at least be a Christian in order to be saved? In 1302 A.D., Pope Boniface VIII in his papal bull *unum sanctum* declared: "That it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff." Latter Day Saints teach that unless one is baptized as a Latter Day Saint or unless someone who is a Latter Day Saint is baptized on behalf of that person—which might be possible even after one is dead—one cannot be saved. Are we committed to the truth in the Bible? Or, to a particular set of beliefs from some church?
7. Read Acts 4:12. Peter and John were addressing the Sanhedrin! God's plan is clearly that the gospel should be spread as far and as wide as possible. But, we also know that if Jesus had not come to answer the questions in the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, the conflict would never be over; Satan might even have won. In that sense, the truth is very clear that without Jesus, none of us could be saved. And what about those

who lived before the days of Jesus? How does His life and His death apply to them?

Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them. Even among the heathen are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. **Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 638.2. [Bold type is added.]

8. Are we to believe from this passage that salvation is available apart from Jesus Christ and what He did on this earth? Or, do we really need to tell them about Jesus? Is it possible that “God is able and willing to apply the merits of Christ’s work to whomever He wishes”? (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, September 21) We have suggested in the past and again in this lesson that God wants to save as many as possible. If that is true and if it is possible for them to be saved by God applying “the merits of Christ’s work” to them, why doesn’t God just do that for everyone? Do people just reject Him?
9. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in reaching out to those who may not have heard the gospel message? How did Job get to know God so well? And what about Melchizedek? Does applying the “merits of Christ’s work” to someone make them savable?
10. Read Psalm 87:4-6; John 10:16; Acts 14:17; 17:25-28; and Romans 2:6-7,12-16. These verses make it very clear that God would like to save as many as possible. There are people who are not of our special group He wants us to reach. God blesses and sustains everyone, giving them existence, life, and breath, even if they do not recognize Him. By doing what God wants, one can be saved even if s/he has never heard of Jesus or God’s law. How does that fit with Leviticus 18:5? **Can we be saved by doing what is right? Would that mean that we will be lost by doing wrong things?**
11. Would it be correct to say that God will judge each person according to how that person has responded to whatever degree of truth he has been exposed? We need to recognize that God has never given the work of judging to any human being.
12. There are some people who believe in what is called universalism. A universalist is one who believes that God loves everyone in the whole world and that He will figure out how to save everyone including the Devil. Is that the meaning of John 12:31-32?
13. This false thinking is based on the idea that God is a severe judge who is looking for ways to keep people out of heaven. Thus, if God loves them, He will forgive them, justify them, and they would automatically be saved. But, justification, i.e. forgiveness, is not the main criteria for being saved. God is forgiveness Personified. He forgives everyone; but, that does not make everyone savable. If a forgiven but unchanged person were admitted to heaven, s/he would just start the whole great controversy all over again.
14. There are others who believe in pluralism. Such people believe that all religions are basically equally valid, and thus, will lead to God and salvation. They believe that no religion is inherently better or superior to any other religion. Such people believe that all the apparent differences between denominations and even different religions are really only surface matters. They would say that God loves everyone and that we must learn to love

all human beings that have a hope for a future blessed life. Thus, in their thinking, all religions are basically equal. They believe it is very chauvinistic and arrogant to try to push a particular set of Christian beliefs, especially upon those who are non-Christians!

15. So, what does the Bible say about universalism and/or pluralism? (See John 14:6; Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8; Daniel 12:2; John 3:18; Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23; and 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10.)
16. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. All whose names are not recorded in the Lamb's book of life end up in the "lake of fire." Persistent sinners of all kinds will perish. Some people will be saved, and others will perish. Each of us will be judged by our own behavior; so, choose to go in at the narrow gate.
17. We know that there are many countries where there is a kind of national religion. It might be Christianity or maybe Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or even communism. Is it possible for people who are culturally immersed in those different religions to be saved because of how they relate to God? If a Christian believes that his Christianity is the only way to salvation, is he being an exclusivist? Or, would it be correct that God has provided a path to salvation; but, we must give up our selfishness, our sinfulness, and seek to enter that narrow path if we want to be saved? Is God asking us to do that on our own? Or, does God have the ability to change us? Is He willing to do that? Does He force us to change?
18. Read John 3:17. God's desire is to save everyone; but, that cannot happen because some of us would just start the rebellion all over again. He will do everything possible to save as many as He can. He is not an evil judge trying to condemn people. The Bible clearly teaches that we are all sinners. (1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicle 6:36; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 14:3; Romans 3:10,23; 1 John 1:9-10) But, we also know that He wishes that everyone would repent and come to Him openly. (Acts 17:30; 26:20; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4)
19. God gives very clear warnings in Scripture to those who are persistently sinners. Read Genesis 6:11-13; Romans 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:12; and Revelation 21:8; 22:15. How much do we know about the death of sinners? Do we have any examples of the second death?

The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. **But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.**

Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. **He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.**—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 753.1-2. [Bold type is added.]

20. Because God loves all of His children and also because He recognizes their need of grace, His plan is for His church to spread the good news to the entire universe. (Ephesians 3:9-10)

The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.1.

21. In what ways can we personally—not the pastor, not the elder or deacon, but we ourselves—learn to show God's glory to a dying world? Do we as a Sabbath school class and as individual Christians have a responsibility for those around us?
22. In previous lessons, we have talked about contextualization. (See 1 Corinthians 9:22-23.) Are we doing everything possible to reach out to people in ways that are meaningful to them? God placed ancient Israel at the crossroads of the then-known world so that they could be God's light to the world. Unfortunately, during most of the time recorded in the Old Testament, they seemed to have hidden their light under a basket.
23. In Christians times, God has promoted a different plan for world mission. It is a kind of salt method: "Go and make disciples." (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15,20; Acts 1:8) We know that many Christians down through the generations have risked their lives to go out among unbelievers and communicate the gospel story. Sometimes, they have been able to reach individuals, sometimes communities, and even occasionally, entire nations.
24. Unfortunately, these plans have not worked out as well as they could have. Some reasons why this is true include:
- (1) Poor planning for outreach, inadequate understanding of the task; (2) narrow focus on mission only as education, health care, disaster relief, or development, which overshadow preaching the gospel; (3) underfunding and understaffing by the sending organizations; (4) missionaries unsuited to the task; and (5) nations that forbid the preaching of the gospel. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, September 24)
25. The going will not always be easy. We are in the midst of the great controversy; Satan knows that if we succeed, it will be all over for him. So, for him it is a life-and-death matter.
26. But we need to remember that:
- By giving the gospel to the world it is in our power to hasten our Lord's return. We are not only to look for but to hasten the coming of the day of God. 2 Peter 3:12, margin. Had [634] the church of Christ done her appointed work as the Lord ordained, the whole world would before this have been warned, and the Lord Jesus would have come to our earth in power and great glory.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 633.3.
27. Satan is doing everything possible to misrepresent the truth and to defeat God's work on this earth. He even sends out false prophets. One day, he will appear himself as a false messiah. And we know that day cannot be far off. We must avoid all openings that might

give Satan an entry into our lives.

28. In discussing the spread of the gospel, the New Testament uses two Greek words accompanied by the adjective *all*: “all the *kosmos*” (See Matthew 26:13; Mark 14:9; 16:15.) and “all the *oikumene*.” (See Matthew 24:14.) *Kosmos* is the more general term and is used 150 times in the New Testament. The term *oikumene* is more specific and refers to the world’s human inhabitants.
29. Within one generation, that small group of Christians after the resurrection and Pentecost had spread the word to Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Macedonia, Greece, and Italy, as well as southern Russia, Ethiopia, India, and probably Spain. How did they accomplish that in such a short period of time? Under very difficult circumstances, they were preaching a message which was illegal?
30. Seventh-day Adventists have claimed that Revelation 14:6-12 is the end-time message for the world. How is that related to the great commission recorded in Matthew 28:19-20? If it is possible for people to be saved without any missionary preaching to them under what we call general revelation, why should we reach out? Partly because we need the experience and partly because God wants to give them the additional opportunity for salvation from hearing the gospel. (Romans 10:14-15)
31. Read Genesis 17:4-6. From the days of Abraham, God intended for the gospel to be spread out to many nations.
32. When He was on this earth, Jesus reached out to sinners. (Luke 15:2) He told stories which suggest that some flagrant sinners might be saved in preference to the so-called saints. (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 17:11-19; Matthew 8:11; 15:21-28) Jesus reached out beyond the borders of Israel, specifically to the demoniacs of Gergesa, the Samaritan leper along the border, the woman of Tyre and Sidon with the demon-possessed daughter, and even to people from the east and the west.
33. Do you feel a responsibility to unreached people groups? With how many people of other denominations or even of other ethnicities do you associate? How could you reach out in a more sensitive way to them? Is it possible that some apparently serious sinners will enter heaven while some “saints” will be left out? (Matthew 7:21-23)
34. God expects us to act on the knowledge that we have. It is not that our actions can save us. However, they reveal the truth about us. (James 1:22-23)
35. Do you think you know some truths that are worth sharing? If so, why are you not sharing them? How many of us are merely intellectual Christians? Does our Christianity really make a difference in the way we live?
36. What is the difference between merely hearing the Word of God and doing it? Remember that the word *obedience* in the Greek New Testament is translated from the Greek word *hupokoē* which means “a humble willingness to listen.”
37. Were the early disciples so successful in their work because their theme was always Jesus Christ and Him crucified? Or, should we accept the idea that those who preach Christianity are bigoted and insensitive to other religious paths?
38. One of the most significant stories that Jesus told involving reaching out to others is the story of the good Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-37) Try to imagine yourself in the place of one or more of the participants in that story. What did the priest and the Levite think and feel when Jesus later told the story about them in their presence?

This was no imaginary scene, but an actual occurrence, which was known to be exactly as represented. The priest and the Levite who had passed by

on the other side were in the company that listened to Christ's words.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 499.1.

39. What difference does it make in the life of a Christian when s/he shares his/her faith? Have you had an individual experience in sharing your faith? Could you be a Christian and not share your faith? Why? Or, why not?

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