

“The Least of These”: Ministering to Those in Need

Jesus and Those in Need

Lesson #7 for August 17, 2019

Scriptures: Luke 1:46-55; 4:16-21; 7:18-21; Matthew 12:15-21; 21:12-16; Mark 11:15-19; Isaiah 53:3-6.

1. This lesson will discuss the relationship between certain Old Testament prophecies and the ministry of Jesus. That ministry had been announced by Mary, His mother, when she visited Elizabeth soon after becoming pregnant. In that introductory sermon upon His return to Nazareth, Jesus Himself stated clearly that His life was to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy as recorded in Isaiah 61:1-2.
2. The problem was that healing the sick, reaching out to the needy, and even raising the dead were not what the Jewish people were looking forward to with the coming of the Messiah. They were looking for a Messiah who would lead armies and help them overthrow the Romans.
3. Read Luke 1:26-38. Try to imagine how Mary must have felt after that surprise visit from Gabriel. Did she dare to tell her parents or Joseph about Gabriel's visit? Did they believe her? (See Matthew 1:18-25.) Did Mary really go all the way to Judea from Galilee without telling them? Did she travel alone? That would probably have been dangerous. When she arrived at the home of Elizabeth, it appears that Elizabeth was already aware, at least partially, of what had happened. And Mary responded to Elizabeth's greetings with Luke 1:46-55.
4. Why would Mary sing a song like that? Were these the common thoughts of the poor in her day? How did Mary even know where to find Elizabeth? Had she visited that home on some previous trip to Jerusalem? We do not know where Elizabeth and Zechariah lived? It may have been near Jerusalem, and it may have been some distance away.

Zacharias dwelt in “the hill country of Judea,” but he had gone up to Jerusalem to minister for one week in the temple, a service required twice a year from the priests of each course.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 97.2.

5. At the time, do you think Mary herself recognized the implications of her speech/song? She must have stayed with Elizabeth until Elizabeth delivered her baby, John the Baptist. Did she recognize some of the similarities between her speech and the speech given by Hannah as recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1-10? Hannah had been desperately praying for a child, and God answered her prayer. Mary was not married and had no thought of becoming pregnant at that time. Both had become pregnant miraculously! How should we compare those two stories?
6. Where did Mary get the information she shared with Elizabeth? Was it something that she had learned personally? Or, perhaps, had been taught from the Old Testament? Or, were these the common ideas of the poor and humble in Galilee?
7. Many commentators, looking at this message from Mary and how it later applied to the ministry of Jesus, refer to it as an “upside-down kingdom.” What is that? The poor on top? Why do you think Jesus spent much of His ministry working especially with the outcasts, the poor, the needy, as opposed to working with the rich, the powerful, and the Jewish leaders?
8. Does God intend that our churches today should be promoting an “upside-down kingdom”? The Seventh-day Adventist Church has always been much more successful at reaching the poor and needy than we have been at reaching the wealthy, powerful, or highly educated. Why do you think that is? Church growth is very slow in the developed world.
9. When Mary arrived at the home of Elizabeth, was Elizabeth completely surprised to see her?

From what we have recorded in Scripture, it seems that Elizabeth already knew about what had happened to Mary. It is very unlikely that there was any way to send a message from Galilee to Judea except by a personal courier. Did God or an angel appear to Elizabeth also? Or, was that information part of what was told to Zechariah? What do you think Mary told Elizabeth about her encounter with Gabriel?

10. Mary was a most remarkable young woman. While probably still a teenager, she was engaged to a man who already had at least six children; (Matthew 13:55-56; Mark 6:3) some of them may have been as old as she was. She taught Jesus herself. Very few women in her day in Palestine had any official education. Jesus also had another remarkable Teacher!

The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. **His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things.** The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee. As He advanced from childhood to youth, He did not seek the schools of the rabbis. He needed not the education to be obtained from such sources; for **God was His instructor.**—*Ibid.* 70.1.†*

11. After having been gone for some time, Jesus returned to Nazareth. So, why did those in the synagogue ask Him to read the Scriptures and comment on them on Sabbath?

[In Jesus's youth and young adulthood,] ... often in the synagogue on the Sabbath day He was called upon to read the lesson from the prophets, and the hearts of the hearers thrilled as a new light shone out from the familiar words of the sacred text.—*Ibid.* 74.2.‡*

12. Clearly, Jesus had often read the Scriptures in the synagogue before. But, this time, things were very different. Jesus announced to His friends and His family that He was the Messiah!
13. Read Isaiah 61:1-2; compare Luke 4:16-21. When Isaiah wrote those words, did he think that they applied to himself only? Did he have any idea that they would, one day, be spoken by God Himself in human form? Notice that the English translation from the original Hebrew is a little different from the translation we have from the Greek in Luke. Why is that?
14. In His presentation at Nazareth as described in Luke 4:14-30, Jesus did not quote the last words of Isaiah 61:1-2, i.e., "And defeat their enemies." (*GNB**) Jesus recognized that was the favorite part of the Jewish people. But, it was not consistent with His mission or ministry.
15. At what point in His childhood, youth, or early ministry, did Jesus recognize that He was going to be promoting an "upside-down kingdom"? In telling the story of Jesus, why do you think Luke began talking about His ministry with this story? Was this Jesus's way of announcing His ministry to the hometown folk? A short time later after choosing His disciples, Jesus apparently gave some or all of the Sermon on the Mount that we can read in Matthew 5-7. These three chapters are often described as *Jesus's mission statement*. How does that fit with these messages from Isaiah and Mary that we are studying?
16. Read Luke 7:18-23. When John the Baptist was arrested and held in prison by Herod Antipas, Jesus moved His ministry from Judea to Galilee. Sometime later, John's disciples came to Jesus, asking if He was the looked-for Messiah. Or, should they be waiting for another? Jesus did not immediately answer the question. Instead, He let them observe His work for much of the day. Why did He do that?
17. Read Matthew 11:1-15. Ellen White explained that John's disciples:
... questioned why, if this new teacher was the Messiah, He did nothing to effect John's release....

These questions were not without effect. Doubts which otherwise would never have arisen were suggested to John. Satan rejoiced to hear the words of these disciples, and to see how they bruised the soul of the Lord's messenger. Oh, how often those who think themselves the friends of a good man, and who are eager to show their fidelity to him, prove to be his most dangerous enemies! How often, instead of strengthening his faith, their words depress and dishearten! —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 214.2-215.1.†

18. John, along with many other Jewish people, believed that the Messiah would liberate them from the Roman yoke. Why did Jesus ignore John's plight? While the world's best Teacher was on this earth, why did so few of the Jewish people correctly understand His mission?
19. Jesus never asks us to believe without giving adequate evidence. The disciples of John went back to him with more than adequate **evidence** of the divinity of Jesus.

God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. **Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith.**—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 105.2.†

20. The choosing of Jesus's disciples is described in Matthew 10. Fairly soon thereafter, Jesus began teaching His disciples and sending them throughout Galilee to announce the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 10:7-8: ⁷ “Go and preach, ‘The Kingdom of heaven is near!’ ⁸Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases, and drive out demons. You have received without paying, so give without being paid.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Matthew 10:7-8). New York: American Bible Society. (Compare Luke 10:1-12.)

21. In descriptions of those early days of Jesus's ministry, why don't we have any stories about the disciples raising the dead? Or, cleansing lepers? Even casting out demons?
22. In our day, how much of the mission statement of Jesus and these instructions to the disciples can we incorporate with our teaching to a lost world about the three angels' messages? For those of us who are not trained as health professionals or educators, how are we to become a part of the healing and teaching ministry of Jesus?
23. Jesus spent much of His time during His ministry healing. In fact, **He spent more time healing than He did preaching.** (*DA* 350.3) Healing was not just an attention getter. He even raised the dead. (See Mark 5:22-43.) He healed people on the Sabbath who had been sick much of their lives. (See John 5:1-15.)
24. After performing such amazing miracles, Jesus could easily have told those who were healed and those connected to them to spread the news that He was the Messiah. In fact, He often told them **not** to tell anyone! Why was that? Despite Jesus's words of instruction, many of those who were healed immediately began announcing that Jesus was the Messiah. While that was true, their idea of what the Messiah was going to do was completely out of harmony with what Jesus really wanted to do and teach. So, in their shouting His praises, they were

likely seriously misrepresenting His mission. See Matthew 12:15-21.

Every miracle that Christ performed was a sign of His divinity. He was doing the very work that had been foretold of the Messiah; but to the Pharisees these works of mercy were a positive offense. The Jewish leaders looked with heartless indifference on human suffering. In many cases their selfishness and oppression had caused the affliction that Christ relieved. Thus His miracles were to them a reproach.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 406.4.

In the face of all his wonderful works they [the Jewish leaders] turned away from Him, who, by the beauty of his doctrine and his mercy and benevolence, had called thousands to his side; **who had relieved suffering humanity, so that entire cities and villages were freed from disease, and there was no work for a physician among them.**—Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*,* vol. 2, 285.3.^{†‡}

25. Without a doubt, Jesus was the most successful Healer of all time. His miracles were acts of compassion and justice. But, Jesus wanted those miracles and His ministry to send a message to the entire world. He was trying to tell the truth about God. See John 17:3.
26. Read John 2:13-17; Matthew 21:12-16; Mark 11:15-19; and Luke 19:45-48. Twice during His ministry, Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. Only John recorded the first cleansing. (John 2:13-17) The three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—recorded the cleansing that occurred at the end of His ministry.
27. Ellen White commented:

Three years before, the rulers of the temple had been ashamed of their flight before the command of Jesus. They had since wondered at their own fears, and their unquestioning obedience to a single humble [592] Man. They had felt that it was impossible for their undignified surrender to be repeated. Yet they were now more terrified than before, and in greater haste to obey His command. There were none who dared question His authority. Priests and traders fled from His presence, driving their cattle before them.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 591.1.
28. So much of Jesus’s ministry was filled with kindness, compassion, and empathy for the people that it might seem completely out of character for Him to cleanse the temple forcefully.
29. The large area of the temple courtyard was supposed to be for the purpose of providing a place for Gentiles to come and observe the religious practices that God had ordained. But, the Jews thought that salvation was only for them and not for any Gentiles; so, they turned that area into a marketplace and a place for the exchange of currencies. The temple tax could only be paid using the temple shekel, and they charged outrageous exchange rates to purchase those shekels.
30. While the Jewish leaders and those who were conducting their businesses in the temple courtyard fled from Jesus, the children, the sick, and those who wanted to hear Jesus crowded in. There was nothing which Jesus said or did that frightened the children. They recognized that Jesus was a prophet. (Matthew 21:11) What was the result of this exercise?

Luke 19:47-48: ⁴⁷ Every day Jesus taught in the Temple. The chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the leaders of the people wanted to kill him, ⁴⁸but they could not find a way to do it, because all the people kept listening to him, not wanting to miss a single word.—*Good News Bible*.* [Compare John 7:49.][‡]

31. Our churches today will never become unfair marketplaces; but, do we ever, at least unconsciously, exclude “outsiders” from our services or our fellowship gatherings?
32. It is almost impossible for us to comprehend how someone carrying out the compassionate, loving ministry of Jesus Christ could lead to the hatred, jealousy, and injustice that He received from the Jewish leaders. But, they recognized that if the nation accepted Him, it would destroy their religious system. Didn’t they recognize what the Scripture says in Isaiah 53:3-6? While Christians clearly recognize those words as a prediction of the work of Jesus, the Jewish people choose to twist them to apply to the sufferings they have endured as a nation.
33. Why do you think that in the middle of that passage in Isaiah 53 it says: “All the while we **thought** that his suffering was punishment sent by God”[†]? Do Christians sometimes suggest that God poured out His wrath on Jesus as our Substitute? It is a major doctrine for many!
34. Clearly, God knows what it means to suffer misunderstanding, evil, and injustice. (See Hebrews 4:15.)
35. **While it is true that the death of Jesus was a substitution for us, this can be greatly misunderstood.** As we seek to correctly present the three angels’ messages, we must do so in the context of the great controversy over God’s character and His form of government. The life and death of Jesus answered the great questions and accusations that Satan had brought against the government of God and His character as a God of love. That was far more than just a substitution.

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but **it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe.** To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but **before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan.** It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would **reveal the nature and the results of sin.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 68.2-69.0 (1890); *Reflecting Christ** 50.3 (1985).[†]

By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels.... Not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. God’s wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which “angels desire to look,” [1 Peter 1:12] and it will be their study throughout endless ages.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 19.2 (1898); *AG** 45.3; *LDE** 31.1; *OFC** 200.3; *Reflecting Christ** 15.4 (1985).[‡]

36. How do you fit these words from Ellen White with our lesson this week?

God has given in His word decisive evidence that He will punish the transgressors of His law. Those who flatter themselves that He is too merciful to execute justice upon the sinner, have only to look to the cross of Calvary. The death of the spotless Son of God testifies that “the wages of sin is death,” that every violation of God’s law must receive its just

retribution. Christ the sinless became sin for man. **He bore the guilt of transgression, and the hiding of His Father's face, until His heart was broken and His life crushed out.** All this sacrifice was made that sinners might be redeemed. In no other way could man be freed from the penalty of sin. **And every soul that refuses to become a partaker of the atonement provided at such a cost must bear in his own person the guilt and punishment of transgression.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 539.3-540.0; *DD** 16.4.†

37. Sin is deadly! It is its own punishment. It is important to recognize that Jesus died because of His Father's withdrawal from Him as They had planned and not from His Father's punishment of Him. (Matthew 27:46) On the cross, Jesus felt God like had abandoned Him. God had not.
38. How well has the Seventh-day Adventist Church in our day done at preaching to the poor, the needy, those suffering injustice, etc.? Are there ways in which we can cooperate with the government and/or other groups such as the Salvation Army, trying to reach out to such people? In this lesson we have touched on Christ's love, compassion, healing ministry, and reaching the needs of the needy while at the same time remembering the terrible injustices that He suffered at the hands of the Jewish leaders. What should we learn from these two very different aspects of His ministry?
39. What should we learn from the cruel treatment of Jesus and His death on the cross? **The cross teaches us so many things about the character and government of God! The cross provides the quintessential answers to Satan's questions and accusations against God.** Until those things are answered, God cannot bring the great controversy to an end.
40. Some have suggested that Jesus was trying to get the Jewish people to carry out a Jubilee restoration. Can you imagine how that would have impacted people in Jesus's day? Is that what was prophesied in Isaiah 61:3-4?
41. The details of all that was supposed to happen under the jubilee celebration were given in some detail by Moses. (See Leviticus 25:8-55.) There is little evidence that such a restoration was ever actually fully carried out by the Jewish people. In fact, the Jewish leaders in Jesus day had devised a way of circumventing the mandates of the jubilee celebration by their own legal system. Is that part of why in Luke 4:19 Jesus seemed to suggest that they should go back to the true jubilee celebration?
42. The challenges that this lesson presents to us are incredible. How can we carry out this healing and teaching ministry of Jesus Christ? Clearly, we cannot perform His miracles; so, what can we do? Do we make excuses for not doing what God called us to do?

The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ.... **It is only through the grace of Christ that the work of restoration, physical, mental, and spiritual, can be accomplished.**—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing** 143.2.†

The object of the medical missionary work [wholistic ministry] is to point sin-sick men and women to the Man of Calvary.—*Ibid.**144.‡

43. Are we alert every day to any opportunity that comes our way to correctly represent Christ?

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