

The Cross *and the* Great Controversy



SABBATH *Afternoon*

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 1, 2, 42; Isa. 53:4; Matt. 4:1; John 12:31-33; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9; Rev. 5:11-14; 12:7-19.*

Memory Text: “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 men unto me” (*John 12:31, 32*).

However central our salvation was to the Cross, we limit our understanding of the Cross if we limit its import to humanity. Only in the context of the great controversy can we fully understand the Cross and why Christ died. Were it not for issues involving the unfallen universe, the Lord instantly could have wiped out Satan after his rebellion, or He could have chosen to save humankind without resorting to sacrificing Himself. However, because the questions surrounding sin, salvation, God's law, and love go beyond this world, the Lord chose to demonstrate what principles and issues are at stake in this cosmic drama. He not only exposed Satan for what He was but revealed to unfallen worlds, in a way never seen before, what their Creator is really like.

At the center of that revelation is the Cross. If we, who see through a “glass, darkly” (*1 Cor. 13:12*), marvel at the Cross, what about those who knew Jesus face to face, before His incarnation and humiliation? Christ's death was for the benefit of them, as well.

The Week at a Glance: How does the Bible reveal the great controversy? What are the issues? What did Jesus experience at the cross? How were His sufferings greater than what we could know? How does the Cross answer issues in the great controversy?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 26.*

The Cosmic Conflict

Read the following texts and write out what they reveal about the great controversy, such as who is involved? In what different ways is the controversy being made manifest? What are some of the issues? Where was, and is, it being fought? Who wins? See *Gen. 3:15; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-15; Zech. 3:1-10; Matt. 4:1; 25:41; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 15:57; Eph. 6:12; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9; Rev. 12:7-17.*

Along with the powerful and insightful views given to us by the Lord through the ministry of Ellen White, there are scattered all through the Bible, in both Testaments, allusions and references to the great controversy. It's there! Indeed, the above verses are only a sampling of what Scripture says about what can be deemed only as a "cosmic conflict," a literal battle that began in another part of the cosmos and that is now being waged here on earth.

Manifestations of this battle are seen from the beginning to the end of Scripture, from the *enmity* between Satan and God's people first implanted by the Lord in human hearts (*Gen. 3:15*), up through the satanic *wrath* manifested at the end of time against those who "keep the commandments of God" (*Rev. 12:17*).

The great news, though, is that the outcome of this battle was assured from the foundation of the world (*Eph. 1:4, Rev. 13:8*). The question facing God wasn't whether He was able to defeat Satan but rather *how* He was going to defeat him and at what cost to Himself. The Cross, more than anything else, reveals what that cost to Himself really was.

In what ways in everyday life do you experience the reality of the great controversy? How should the knowledge that the outcome is assured help you stand firm amid your own struggles in this often painful, trying conflict?

Key Text: *John 12:31-33.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore how the great controversy magnifies the Cross.
2. To recognize how Jesus has exposed, conquered, and ultimately will destroy our accuser.
3. To help cope with the dilemma of human suffering by considering the scope of Jesus' suffering on behalf of our salvation.

Lesson Outline:

I. A Revelation for Humanity and the Universe (*Job 1, 2, 42*).

- A. To more fully understand the Cross, we have to view it in the context of the great controversy.
- B. The Lord chose to reveal the principles of His kingdom to humankind and to unfallen worlds.
- C. The outcome of this cosmic conflict was assured from the foundation of the world.

II. The Accuser Exposed (*Isa. 14:12-15*).

- A. Satan attempted to exalt himself above the Creator.
- B. Only when the Savior died in order to pay the penalty for sin could the consequences of Satan's rebellion be fully exposed.
- C. Jesus upheld the validity of God's law and His justice while demonstrating His mercy.

III. The Cross and Human Suffering (*Isa. 53:4*).

- A. Jesus died for humanity, taking on Himself the sins of the world; all its guilt and suffering.
- B. The great-controversy theme reveals the battle between good and evil, the cause of all suffering.
- C. Because of the Cross, all sin and suffering will end.

Summary: God, in the Person of His Son, demonstrated to humanity and the un-fallen worlds His justice and mercy at the Cross. He is vindicated by taking upon Himself the sin and suffering of the world. Only through the lens of the great-controversy theme can we begin to understand the scope of what Jesus bore for us. O, matchless love! Let us ardently give thanks and praise to our magnanimous Savior.

COMMENTARY

The Cross and the Great Controversy.

Introduction. Satan's treacherous warfare against the government of God is laid bare by the penetrating searchlight of Calvary, for in

The Cross and the Defeat of Satan

Read John 12:31-33, Hebrews 2:14, 1 John 3:8. How do these texts relate the Cross to the final destruction of Satan in the great controversy?

At the cross, the pivotal moment in the great controversy arrives. Satan has been “cast out,” repudiated, exposed. In vision (*Rev. 12:10*) the apostle John heard “a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.” Only when the Saviour died “for the sins of the whole world” (*1 John 2:2*) could heaven proclaim that *Salvation has now come*. At Calvary the divine promise, first mentioned in Scripture back in Genesis 3:15, became a reality.

How do we relate Christ’s sacrificial death to the great controversy?

As we saw earlier, though Christ Himself was sinless, He died under divine judgment as our Sin Bearer (*Isa. 53:6, 11, 12; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18*). At the Cross, God assumed His own judgment on sin. The Creator took upon Himself our humanity so that His life—more than equal to lives of created beings—would atone for the sins of all humanity. In this manner the death of Christ upheld the validity of the moral law and demonstrated that God could be both just and merciful in character. The apostle Paul explains the significance of the Cross, particularly in light of the great controversy, with these points: “God [the Father] presented him [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate [before humanity and unfallen worlds] his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished [that is, moral sin in Old Testament times could not really be atoned by animal blood (*Heb. 10:4*)]—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (*Rom. 3:25, 26, NIV*).

At the Cross, Jesus upheld the validity of God’s law, provided a sufficient substitutionary sacrifice for every sinner, exposed Satan’s true character to the universe, and provided the means in which everyone could be saved. What does each one of these things mean to us as individuals immersed in the great controversy? Which one of these accomplishments do you believe is the most important, and why?

the Cross are distilled all the principles of mercy and justice—unmeasured mercy to the repentant, unmitigated justice to the rebellious. In the Cross also is the power of regeneration and recreation that guarantees the abolition of sin and the vindication of eternal righteousness.

I. The Cosmic Conflict.

As profound as Satan's scheme of deception was, and as varied were his lines of attack, God from the outset had the one all-sufficient answer to sin and rebellion—the everlasting gospel. So far beyond belief were the depths of evil as it took an ever more elaborate and sinister form in Satan's mind, that the nature of the divine remedy and the need for it could be understood only as Satan's program was allowed to manifest itself in its complete character.

“God's dealings with rebellion will result in fully unmasking the work that has so long been carried on under cover. The results of Satan's rule, the fruits of setting aside the divine statutes, will be laid open to the view of all created intelligences. The law of God will stand fully vindicated. It will be seen that all the dealings of God have been conducted with reference to the eternal good of His people, and the good of all the worlds that He has created. Satan himself, in the presence of the witnessing universe, will confess the justice of God's government and the righteousness of His law.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 338, 339; see also *Isa. 45:22, 23; Rom. 14:9-13*.

II. The Cross and the Defeat of Satan.

By inciting wicked men to torment and crucify the Prince of Peace, Satan fully exposed his remorseless character of malicious rebellion.

At the Cross, “The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.

“Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan's existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761; see also Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 244.

III. The Cross and Human Suffering.

The great scene brought to view in Revelation 5 calls for deep study. In this chapter the record of human history, interfused with a revelation of God's intervening providence, is produced in a seven-sealed scroll. So full of anguish and agony is the record of human suffering and injustice, so profound is the revelation of God's intimate

The Cross and Human Suffering (Part 1)

The Cross, and the salvation offered to us because of the Cross, are key to the great controversy. The means by which the Lord upheld the validity of the law, while at the same time saving those who had transgressed that law, were crucial in answering Satan's charges against Him before intelligences in the universe, which themselves have a stake in the outcome of the great controversy (*see Rom. 8:22*).

Read Revelation 5:11-14. Where is this scene taking place? Who is involved? Whom are they praising, and why? How do these verses help show the centrality of the Cross to the great controversy?

However deeply involved and interested the universe is in the Cross and the great controversy, we must never forget that redemption was accomplished here on earth, for the sake of human beings. Christ took upon Himself a human, not angelic, nature (*Heb. 2:16*), because He came to save humans, not angels. Without the Cross and all that it entails (including the Resurrection), all humanity would, one way or another, face only eternal oblivion.

In John 12:32, Jesus talked about His death drawing all men toward Him. What does that mean? What was it about the Cross that draws us to Jesus?

Christ's assumption of humanity, of human nature, however crucial to the plan of salvation, wasn't enough to save humanity. According to the eternal plan (*2 Tim. 1:9*), Christ would die for the world, taking on Himself, in His Personhood and in His deity, the sins of the world, and all the guilt and suffering inherent in those sins. Every sin was there, at the Cross, falling on the Son of God. What an incredible spectacle to the universe, to see their sinless Commander suffering in Himself for a fallen race. Though the main purpose of the Cross was to save us, it also revealed much about the character of God to the universe.

All our suffering, as humans, results from sin, does it not? Keeping that thought in mind, what do Paul's words that "he hath made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (*2 Cor. 5:21*) tell us about what Christ suffered on the cross in our behalf? How does this knowledge help draw us toward Him?

and truly caring involvement in earth's history, that no created being has the emotional stamina, the intellectual prowess, or the depth of moral perception to lift the weight of that record and bear the disclosure of its contents. But Christ in the guise of the slain Lamb has the right and the power to open the record, interpret its contents, and bring all the issues disclosed in it to final and glorious resolution. His

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Isaiah 14:12-15, 53:4, John 12:31-33, Hebrews 2:14, Revelation 5:11-14, 12:7-19.*

① Isaiah allows us to step into the broad themes of the universe. One of those themes encompasses the rebellion of Lucifer, the chief among Jesus' created angels, who sought to exalt himself above God. The Scripture declares, "How you have fallen" (*Isa. 14:12, NIV*)! When have you tried to exalt yourself, only to have fallen? How often has your failure been because you have rebelled against God's purpose and His leading in your life?

② Books, movies, and other medias use a plot of good triumphing over evil to gain our attention. The Bible allows us to look into a cosmic conflict we call the great controversy in order to understand the real issues in our world. How does God's sharing this big picture with us help you trust Him more? Why is this so necessary to help us more fully understand the issues at stake at the Cross?

③ Jesus bore all the sin and suffering of the world (*see Isa. 53:4, Heb. 2:14*). In what ways have you experienced suffering? How has Jesus' sharing in our humanity helped you to have faith to persevere during trying times? Share the good news of a final end to suffering with a friend or neighbor who is experiencing trials.

④ As you consider the Cross, have you ever wondered why Jesus would be willing to die for us knowing how few would appreciate His gift? Paul tells us that Jesus endured because of "the joy set before Him" (*Heb. 12:2, NIV*). He had plans for your rescue, for your friendship for eternity. How does this help you value yourself more? How will you share the wonderful, good news of the Cross with your friends and neighbors this week?

⑤ Revelation 5:11-14 contains an amazing worship celebration. All the creatures of heaven and earth praise the wonders of God's matchless love. Imagine yourself at that worship service. In what ways have you found Jesus to be worthy of praise? How do the themes of salvation and your personal rescue impact your worship of God, here and now, as you wait for that heavenly assembly?

The Cross and Human Suffering (Part 2)

One of the greatest challenges that Christians face is the question of suffering. Why, if there is an all-powerful and all-loving God, does so much suffering exist? What Christian hasn't at some point felt the power of that daunting question assault his or her own faith?

Of course, the great controversy motif, with the battle between good and evil explained to us, certainly helps us understand the big picture behind suffering. And we know, too, that one day it will all end, and in a way that will vindicate the character of God. Even so, the question of suffering continues to confront us simply because so often there are no real answers to it, at least not answers that make sense to us now.

Read Job 1, 2, and 42. How does this story help us understand the background of the great controversy that's such a part of human suffering? Yet, what questions about Job's sufferings were left unanswered that still don't make sense?

If you look at the sufferings of Job, or of any human being, one point mustn't be missed: All human suffering is individual suffering. Whether we are weeping for ourselves or for others, it's only our own tears that we shed. We can never splice into other people's nerves to feel a spasm of their pain, a prick of their woe, no matter how close or intimate we are. Other people's pain comes to us only as our own; our own, then, is all that we can ever know. Each of us experiences only our own pain, only our own suffering, never another's. Whether we are suffering and dying alone or en masse, our pain can never exceed what our personal metabolism allows; we will never experience more suffering than what our own delirious cells can carry. No one ever ached beyond what he or she, individually, could; the moment the threshold was crossed, death struck.

We're often horrified, and rightly so, by the great numbers of people who suffer in tragedies. Yet, no matter the numbers (whether one or one million), each person's suffering is limited by the fact that he or she could suffer no more than an individual could suffer. How does this idea help you understand better the question of human tragedy?

cross enabled Him to bear the whole supernatural weight of human woe and bring in a resistless tide of healing and restoration in the lives of all who welcome His saving grace and power. This inspires the praise and thanksgiving of the whole universe. Look for thematic links between Revelation 5 and Romans 8:19-28.

IV. The Cross and Human Suffering (continued).

It is the Cross of Calvary that makes our suffering not only tolerable but also creative, in effect, if we are committed to having fellowship with Christ's sufferings and are willing to suffer for His glory. This is not a morbid process or one that makes our own sacri-

Witnessing

When you are looking for the perfect opportunity to share the wonderful plan of salvation with a nonbeliever, think about extending an invitation to this person to accompany you to a local planetarium (if there is one—if not, point him or her to a clear night sky). What a backdrop for the story of the great controversy! As you are watching the spectacular night-sky show, you have an exceptional opportunity to explain the epic battle going on right now that has attracted sweeping cosmic interest—a cosmic battle of good versus evil that is more comprehensive, more vast, than any *Star Wars* installment. Share with this person that Christ's victory on the cross not only redeemed all earth's inhabitants but was very carefully viewed by countless perfect beings located on planets far removed from earth's sinful environment. Talk about how Satan (and sin) has been exposed for what he truly is, while, at the same time, God has been shown for what He truly is—loving, merciful, and just, and that all this is playing out right before these other worlds and their inhabitants. Let the nonbeliever know that free choice will determine the ultimate outcome for humanity.

When you are asked (and you will be if you haven't already faced the question) why a loving God can permit such suffering here on earth, you can respond by explaining the depth of suffering Christ experienced. He bore the scourge of every illness; every disease; every physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual hurt known to humankind. Put in those terms, it is impossible to understand the depth of suffering, pain, grief, and despair He experienced. No one has ever suffered as He did, and no one ever will again. He knows *firsthand* what the worst suffering is like, and He will allow no one to bear more than he or she is able.

During times of great distress, Jesus will hold and comfort and soothe. He will never let one who calls on Him go through any experience alone. At the time of His choosing, He will be there to welcome all home, to live with Him forever!

The Cross and Human Suffering (Part 3)

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4*).

So far we have seen that all human pain and suffering come from sin. We saw, too, that, as humans, we experience only our own pain, only our own suffering, never another’s. Human suffering is always, and only, individual suffering. And finally we saw that, at the Cross, the sins of the whole world (and the cause of the whole world’s suffering) fell on Jesus, the Sin Bearer.

With these few points in mind, read Isaiah 53:1-12. Notice particularly verse 4. In the context of what we’ve been studying the past few days, what does this chapter, especially verse 4, tell us about what God Himself suffered in the great controversy because of sin?

The point is that although we know only our own pain, only our own suffering, at the Cross, God felt it all, at once. What we know only *individually*, the Lord felt *corporately*, at the Cross. At Calvary, the Lord linked Himself to us through the essence of our humanity; that is, through our pain—only the level He experienced was greater and more intense than any other human being has ever known.

Thus, when the great controversy is over and all the issues resolved, no human being ever will be able to say that he or she suffered worse than did God Himself. At the Cross, the Lord showed humanity and the onlooking universe that in order to deal with the issues raised by Satan in a just, fair, and merciful manner, He Himself was willing to suffer worse than any fallen being ever had or ever could. He bore our griefs and our sorrows—that is, all our griefs and all the sorrows that we feel only as individuals, He felt at once!

Who can even begin to comprehend this incredible reality? No wonder the universe looks upon the Cross with awe, praise, and wonder (*Rev. 5:11-14*).

How does this idea, that God in Christ, at the Cross, suffered worse than any human ever could, put the whole question of human suffering in a perspective that helps us better understand it?

fices and sorrows the center of our thoughts. Paul speaks of suffering for Christ's sake in very open terms that bear no hint of self-pity (*see 2 Cor. 1:5-10, 4:6-12, Phil. 1:29, 3:10, 2 Tim. 2:12*). Self-transcendent suffering endured on the path of gospel service has influence under God's blessing to remove prejudice and resistance from the hearts of many who would otherwise remain stonily indifferent to the claims of Christ. But as God's servants cheerfully and dauntlessly bear their cross (*see Luke 9:23*), their lives register the power of God's love (*1 Pet. 2:15-25, 1 John 3:16*).

V. The Cross and Human Suffering (concluded).

“The cross of Calvary challenges, and will finally vanquish, every earthly and hellish power. In the cross all influence centers, and from it all influence goes forth. It is the great center of attraction, for on it Christ gave up His life for the human race. This sacrifice was offered for the purpose of restoring man to his original perfection; yea, more. It was offered to give him an entire transformation of character, making him more than a conqueror. Those who in the strength of Christ overcome the great enemy of God and man, will occupy a position in the heavenly courts above angels who have never fallen.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 242.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: When have you felt most like a citizen of the world, and why? Watching an event on TV? Visiting a place outside your country? Hearing a report on Mission Spotlight?

Verses for Group Focus: *Revelation 5:6-14*.

Thought Questions:

- ❶ According to the first song sung in His honor (*Rev. 5:9, 10*), why is the Lamb worthy of worship?
- ❷ Three different groups sing songs of worship to the Lamb. Who composes each group, and what might be some of the reasons these three groups are represented in this way?

Application Questions:

- ❶ What do the songs in Revelation 5:9, 10, 12, 13 teach us about the Cross and the great controversy? How might we join in these songs of worship?
- ❷ Revelation 5: 8, 14 points to Jesus' rule as King. In what way is Jesus your King? What difference does He make in your life?

Further Study: “It will be seen that He who is infinite in wisdom could devise no plan for our salvation except the sacrifice of His Son. The compensation for this sacrifice is the joy of peopling the earth with ransomed beings, holy, happy, and immortal. The result of the Saviour’s conflict with the powers of darkness is joy to the redeemed, redounding to the glory of God throughout eternity. And such is the value of the soul that the Father is satisfied with the price paid; and Christ Himself, beholding the fruits of His great sacrifice, is satisfied.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 652.

“Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, discuss the idea presented this week about the individuality of human suffering as opposed to what Christ suffered corporately at the Cross. What does this idea tell us about the character of God? What does it mean that God Himself would suffer all the woes of the whole world? What would this truth reveal about God to unfallen worlds, as well?
- ② How should the idea of Christ as our Sin Bearer—as the innocent One suffering for the guilty—impact how we treat others? How does the idea of bearing “one another’s burdens” (*Gal. 6:2*) reflect, in a small way, what Christ did for us at the Cross?
- ③ There are many Bible-believing people who attempt to understand sin, suffering, and salvation apart from the great-controversy motif. Put yourself in their shoes and try to explain some of these things another way, apart from the great controversy. How well does it work?