

# Jesus and the Social Outcasts<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—FEBRUARY 8

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Matthew 21:28–32; John 8:1–11; Mark 5:1–20; John 4:5–32; Matthew 9:9–13.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “The woman left her water jar and went back to the town. She said to the people, ‘Come. See a man who told me everything I’ve [I have] ever done. Could this be the Christ?’ The people came out of the town and made their way toward Jesus” (John 4:28–30, NIV).

**A YOUNG WOMAN SAT IN PRISON.** She had come from a sad and terrible background (which included two out-of-wedlock children by the time she was fifteen years old). She was awaiting trial because she had murdered a social worker who had come to take away her baby. The baby was the only person from whom she had ever felt any love.

Without mother, father, husband, any relative, or even a friend, she faced the very sad future alone. But, through the visits of a pastor, this hopeless young woman learned that Christ loved and forgave her. No matter how society judged this young girl, she knew God’s eternal love. This social outcast discovered meaning and purpose in her Lord. His love and acceptance went above all societal rules, even the “good” ones.

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1. outcasts—people who are not accepted by “regular” people.

**SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 9****BOTTOM DWELLERS<sup>2</sup>**  
(Matthew 21:28–32)

Societies establish classes of people. Wealthy or well-educated people usually have the highest positions. Good, moral citizens, the “common” people, normally are in the middle of the social ladder. That leaves the bottom dwellers, or outcasts. They are the prostitutes (a person who uses sex for pay), drug abusers, criminals, homeless, and others. During Christ’s time, that list also included lepers and tax collectors.

**Read Matthew 21:28–32 and Luke 15:1–10. What do these verses teach about Christ’s attitude (thoughts and feelings) toward social outcasts?**

What did the bottom dwellers discover that the higher-class people often missed? Why did Jesus seem to reach more bottom dwellers than people of the higher classes?

The outcasts might have been hardened by sinful pleasures. And they might have seemed very tough. But they were still easier to reach than the proud, boastful people of the higher social class. Often the outcasts put up a brave front. But they really felt empty inside, and they had very low self-worth. Often such people openly rebel (turn against authority) during their teenage years.

They also try to cover up their feelings of low self-worth, but they fail. So, they rebel against authorities, such as their parents.

Jesus did not try to damage the low sense of self-worth of the outcasts He met. Instead, He created a renewed sense of personal value in them. He did this by loving and accepting them. And their hearts often melted when Jesus approached them warmly and lovingly.

**What is your own attitude (feeling) toward outcasts? Be honest: do you feel that you are better than they are? If so, think about what those feelings mean.**



Lepers and prostitutes were at the bottom of the social ladder in Jesus’ day.

**MONDAY—FEBRUARY 10**

**“IN THE VERY ACT” (John 8:1–11)**

**Read John 8:1–11. What do these**

2. bottom dwellers—people who are considered to be part of the lowest class of society; outcasts.

### verses teach us about Jesus and people of the lower class in society?

After taking a spiritual break from His Mount of Olives retreat, Jesus returns to the temple. Crowds gather. While Christ is teaching, the Pharisees bring to Him a woman who was caught in adultery (sex outside of marriage). They question Jesus about Moses' law concerning adultery. This means sure death for the woman. Jesus, however, recognizes that their questioning is not honest. He understands that it covers up a darker purpose. The purpose is entrapment<sup>3</sup> of Jesus and not truth-seeking. At this time, the death penalty was no longer handed down from Jewish courts. It was decided by Roman courts instead. So, Jewish leaders reasoned that Christ might betray His loyalty to the law if He should reject stoning the woman. But if Christ should support death for the woman, the Jews would claim that Christ had broken Roman law.

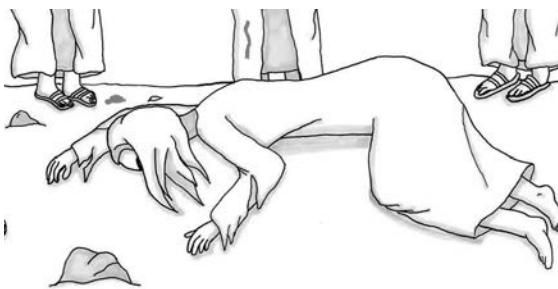
Caught in the middle of the leaders' political challenge is this helpless and guilty woman. She cannot know Jesus' merciful nature. Strangely, He appears to sentence her to death. But the fact that He starts His statement with those unforgettable words, "He that is without sin . . ." demonstrates that He actually is showing her mercy.

Those words trap the Jewish leaders. Sinless people might be authorized to mercilessly give punishment.

But sinful people should be more merciful. Except for Jesus, there are no sinless people around. Slowly the religious leaders walk away. And this woman, who might have been guilty, receives grace.<sup>4</sup>

"Jesus pardons this woman and encourages her to live a better life. So His character [who He is] shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness [holiness]. While He does not support sin, He tries not to punish her to death but to save her. The world judged this woman as very guilty. But Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 462.

**Ellen G. White gives more details about this woman. The woman was an adulteress (woman who sins in adultery), caught "in the very act." The planning of the leaders did not change that fact. And yet, she was still forgiven. How do we learn to show grace, even to the guilty, while still not supporting sin?**



**Jesus does not seek to punish sinners but to save them.**

3. entrapment—the tricking of someone into doing or saying something that is wrong or illegal.

4. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

**TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 11****THE LOWEST OF THE LOW  
(Mark 5:1–20)**

**Read Mark 5:1–20. Compare<sup>5</sup> this man’s situation with the plight (bad condition) of modern homeless people. Compare his description with that of patients who are mentally (of the mind) ill. How are they the same or different? How does modern society treat people who suffer from mental illness? What explains Christ’s warning about publicizing (making public) the event while still advising others to keep it secret?**

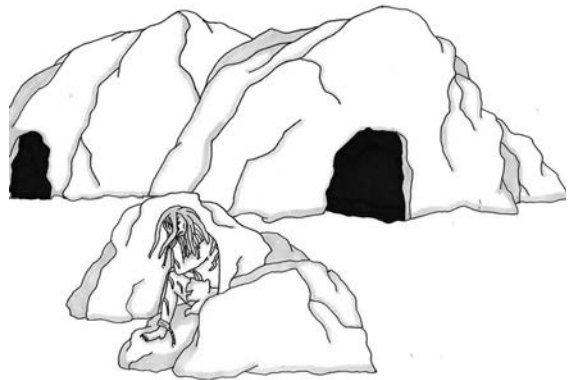
To many of us today, it is hard to imagine someone in such a terrible condition. The man was even living in a cemetery. Some argue that the man was just insane. But the Bible says he was not. (Besides, how does that idea fit with what happened to the pigs?)

An important point for us in this story is that no matter how mentally ill a person is, no one should be ignored. In some cases, professional help is needed, and it should be given when possible.

As Christians, we must remember that Christ died for everyone. Even people whom we might feel we cannot help still deserve as much mercy and respect and kindness as possible. Who are we to think that any-

one is a hopeless case or is beyond the power of God? To us things can look bad, but to God every person is of limitless worth. If it were not for the Cross, all our cases would be hopeless. We should remember this point as we deal with very disturbed and damaged people.

**Think deeply about some of the people you know who are truly in bad shape, whether mentally, spiritually, or physically. Try to understand them in the way that you think our loving God understands them. Besides praying for them, what can you do to help them and show them something of the love of God?**



**No one is beyond the saving power of God.**

**WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 12****THE WOMAN AT THE WELL  
(John 4:5–32)**

**Study John 4:5–32, and then answer the following questions.**

5. compare—show how two or more things are the same or different.

1. What social rules does Jesus break here, and why? What should this tell us about “social rules” and how we should deal with them when they prevent witnessing? What social rules might be preventing your witness to others?

2. How does Jesus talk with the woman about her sinful life? What lessons can we learn from His approach?

3. What does this story show about the negative feelings of Jesus’ disciples? Again we have to ask ourselves, how are we guilty of the same thing?

4. We are impressed by the fact that Jesus knows that the woman has sinned. But what does the woman say in her witness that shows that she still has some questions about who Jesus is? What lessons can we learn from this about our own need for patience when it comes to the training of disciples?

#### THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 13

#### PUBLICANS<sup>6</sup> AND SINNERS (Matthew 9:9–13)

It is hard to imagine what our world would have been like if sin had not come. Even after six thousand years, the beauty of nature still testifies to (tells of) the majesty and power and

goodness of God. Our sin-darkened minds cannot understand what people and their affairs would have been like if our world had not fallen into sin. One thing we can be sure of is that there would not have been any class differences or things to divide people against each other.

Unfortunately, classes and cultures<sup>7</sup> will not vanish before Christ returns. Instead, as our world gets worse, these problems will get worse, too. But, as Christians, we must do what we can to go beyond these problems that have caused so much heartache and suffering and pain in our world. This is especially true of our attitude toward people of lower classes.

**Read Matthew 9:9–13.** In what way is the best example of true Christianity shown here, especially in what Jesus says and does? Think about His words, which are taken from the Old Testament: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6, NKJV). With this in mind, why must we be so careful to not become guilty of having an attitude that Jesus would not approve of?

“The Pharisees watched Christ sitting and eating with publicans and sinners. He was calm, kind, courteous, and friendly. They should have admired Him, but He was so unlike themselves that they could not stand the sight. The proud Pharisees glorified [honored] themselves, and they

6. publicans—tax collectors who were hated by the Jews because the taxes they collected from them for Rome made them very rich.

7. cultures—the ways that people live, dress, think, eat, and socialize with one another.



looked down on those who had not been as blessed as they themselves had. They hated the publicans and sinners. But God saw that their guilt was the greater. Heaven's light was flashing across their pathway, saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it;' but they had spurned [refused to accept] the gift."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, page 1088.



Nature still tells of the goodness of God.

## FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 14

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, "At Jacob's Well," pages 183–195; "Peace, Be Still," pages 333–341; "Among Snares," pages 460–462, in *The Desire of Ages*; and "Helping the Tempted,"<sup>8</sup> pages 164–169; "Working for the Intemperate,"<sup>9</sup> pages 171–182; "Help for the Unemployed and the Homeless," pages 183–200, in *The Ministry [Work Done for God] of Healing*.

8. tempted—those who feel the desire to give into sin.

9. intemperate—those with no self-control.

"The one group of people that Jesus would never accept was those who were very proud and looked down upon others. . . .

"The fallen must be led to feel that it is not too late for them to be men. Christ honored people with His trust. Even those who had fallen the lowest He treated with respect. It was very painful to Christ when He had to deal with human sins. But He never showed that He was very shocked or turned off by sinful humans. Whatever evil habits and sins humans did, He met all people with pity and mercy. As we take part in the leading of His Spirit, we shall treat all men as brethren [brothers]. They all face the same temptations and troubles. They often fall and struggle to rise again. They battle with discouragements and difficulties. They desire sympathy and help. Then we shall meet them in such a way as not to discourage or push them away but to awaken hope in their hearts."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pages 164, 165.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① What personal attitudes might need to be changed so that you can become a better witness to people of the lower classes? What group practices should be changed to make your church better in its outreach to this group of people? How should modern Christians establish reasonable

expectations when working for the hardest and most difficult cases?

② How did Jesus avoid both excusing sins and criticizing sinners? In what ways did Christ use trust and encouragement to stop the downfall of outcasts? Because outcasts

were suspicious of religious leaders, how did Christ make these potential (possible) disciples comfortable with Himself?

③ What prevents outcasts from attending church? How can we help with this problem?