

Jesus' Teachings and the Great Controversy (War Between Christ and Satan)



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 11:29; Romans 4:1–6; Matthew 13:3–8, 18–23; Matthew 7:21–27; James 2:17; Matthew 7:1–5.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Come to me, all of you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest’ ” (Matthew 11:28, NIV).

WHEN WE THINK OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY THEME, we are likely to think of it as something amazing and larger-than-life. And it is just that—a big-picture view. For this reason, it can be called a “metanarrative,” a story that covers and explains more than one thing or story. A metanarrative is more than just a local story, which explains something much more limited and realistic. For example, Paul Revere’s famous ride is a local story, while a much more glorious (full of awe and wonder) and larger picture is given of the American Revolution itself.

And the picture showing the great controversy theme may be bigger and more glorious. But it is done daily, here on earth, in our own lives, in how we relate to God, to temptation, and to others. People’s daily lives are influenced in some way—large or small—by the bigger events of politics and economics. In the same way, each of our lives is influenced by the big events of the great controversy.

In this week’s lesson, we will read about some of Jesus’ humble, down-to-earth teachings on common, everyday matters. This study will help us as we struggle to know and do God’s will as the great controversy unfolds around us.

MANY KINDS OF REST (Matthew 11:29)

“ ‘Take My yoke¹ upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls’ ” (Matthew 11:29, NKJV). How does taking His “yoke” bring rest to our souls?

This offer adds a personal side to the much larger picture of Jesus’ mission to free people from the enemy. His words are actually adapted from Jeremiah. Jeremiah promises people rest for their souls if they return to the religion of their fathers, instead of the idol worship of the surrounding nations (Jeremiah 6:16).

The picture of rest is very rich in the Bible. It starts with God Himself. He rested when He finished His work of Creation (Genesis 2:2). His rest brought forth a Sabbath rest that was celebrated weekly. Rest also was celebrated (1) through the year during the annual feasts (for example, Leviticus 16:31), (2) every seven years in the “Sabbath of the land” (Exodus 23:11), and (3) every 50 years in the jubilee, when slaves were freed and debts forgiven (Leviticus 25:10).

Rest could be enjoyed when God was with His people (Exodus 33:14), where there were no enemies or evil events that happen (1 Kings 5:4; Deuteronomy 25:19). Rest was enjoyed in the land that God gave His people (Joshua 1:13), especially when the people returned from slavery in Babylon (Jeremiah 30:10). Rest also was shared in hospitality with strangers (Genesis 18:4) and in enjoying peaceful family life (Ruth 1:9; Proverbs 29:17).

But there is no rest for God’s people in other countries (Exodus 5:4, 5; Lamentations 1:3). Rest escapes the wicked, who are the same as the rough, troubled sea. They cannot rest (Isaiah 57:20). The only rest that such people can look forward to is death and the grave (Job 3:11, 13, 16–18). Revelation 14:11 also has a powerful warning about rest for those on the wrong side of the great controversy in the last days.

The rest Jesus offers is a very generous (kind) gift. It includes the gift of the Sabbath. Christ’s offer of rest recognizes our lost condition and restores (makes new) us in every way. And when we make mistakes (as we do), we still have the promise of a place of rest at our Savior’s side.

What are ways, besides the Sabbath, that we can learn to enjoy the rest that God offers us? How do we find rest for our souls in Jesus? Read also Romans 4:1–6.



The rest Jesus offers is a very generous (kind) gift.

DEFINITIONS

1. yoke—a wooden frame placed upon two oxen of different sizes. The yoke also helps train the smaller ox to work with the larger one and makes its load lighter.

PLANTING AND HARVESTING (Matthew 13:3–8)



We must sow the gospel seed everywhere.

The great controversy theme is clear in Jesus' parable² of the sower. The list of four kinds of answers to the gospel message shows that there are more than just "good" and "bad" people in the world. Life is difficult to understand, so we need to be careful how we approach (deal with) those who do not seem to accept the gospel as we think they should.

Read Matthew 13:3–8 and then Matthew 13:18–23. In what ways can we so clearly understand how real the great controversy is in this story?

The battle for souls is real. The enemy (Satan) uses whatever methods he can to turn people away from salvation. For example, about the seed falling by the wayside, Ellen G. White wrote: "Satan and his angels are in the meetings where the gospel is preached. Angels of heaven try to impress hearts with the word [the Bible] of God. But the enemy tries hard to make the word useless. Satan is eager to slow down the work of the Spirit of God. Christ is drawing the soul by His love. But Satan tries to turn away the one who is touched by God to accept and follow the Saviour."—Adapted from *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 44.

One could ask, *Why could the farmer not be more careful and not waste seed by throwing it on the path? Why could he not be more strict about digging out the rocks? Why did he not pull more weeds?*

When sowing gospel seed, human effort is always limited. We must sow everywhere. We are not the judge of what is good and bad soil. The weeds show that we are not able to prevent evil from springing up in the least expected places. It is the Lord of the harvest working in the background who ensures that all who can be saved will be saved. We do our job and must learn to trust Him to do His.

DEFINITIONS

2. parable—a very short story used to teach a truth or a spiritual lesson.

What are ways we can know how real this parable is? Why do some people who are just newly baptized walk out the door? Or why do others simply show no interest in God at all? And why do others become strong in the faith?

BUILDING ON ROCK (Matthew 7:21–27)

The issue of where we stand in the controversy (war) going on around us is very important. This issue touches each of our lives. We understand just how personal the great controversy is to each of us in the parable of the man building a house on the rock.

Read Matthew 7:21–27. What is so frightening about this parable?

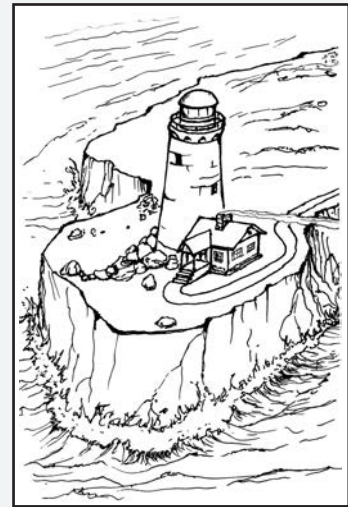
What comes to mind when you imagine this story? Where is the rock and where is the sand? For some people, sand is found only at the beach. But this story is probably not about a seaside house. The more likely place is among the gentle rolling hills upon which most villages were located, at the side of a valley somewhere.

Jesus describes two houses. One is built just on the surface while the other has foundations going down to bedrock (Luke 6:48). There is no way to tell the difference between the two finished houses until it rains up in the hills. Then a flash flood roars down the valley. For one of the home builders, that is not a problem, because the house is built upon bedrock. But, for the other, there is a problem. Without a strong foundation, the house just built on the surface is swept away in the rushing floodwaters.

Jesus shared this parable because He knows how much we fool ourselves. There is a serious struggle going on. Without any help, we cannot survive it. Jesus has succeeded against evil. So that is why He is called the Rock.

This personal battle against evil can be won. But it is possible only if we build our lives firmly upon Him (the Rock). And we can build upon Him only through obedience to Him. “So then, everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a wise man. He builds his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24, NIV). It is that simple. Faith is very important. However, the Bible says that faith without works is “dead” (read James 2:17, 20, 26). In this parable we find just how dead it really is.

Read Matthew 7:22, 23. Casting out demons in Jesus’ name or making prophecies (saying what will happen in the future) in His name all show that each of these people had “faith” of some sort. But what happened to them? Ask yourself, upon what foundation is your house built? How do you know the answer?



We can build upon Jesus, the Rock, only through obedience to Him.

DO NOT JUDGE (Matthew 7:1–5)



It is so easy for us to see a piece of sawdust in our brother's or sister's eye but miss seeing the great wooden beam in our own.

Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount in the early days of His ministry (work done for God). The sermon included surprising teachings. For starters, He told common people that they were valued and blessed in the eyes of God (Matthew 5:3–12). He also said that they were salt (Matthew 5:13) and light (Matthew 5:14–16). Salt and light were prized by the people. Jesus spoke of the importance of God's law (Matthew 5:17–19). But He warned them of trying to impress others with their own good behavior (Matthew 5:20). Jesus further pointed out that morality (righteousness; a holy life) is determined by what a person thinks, not just by their actions (Matthew 5:21–28). But He also warned them that their actions must be guarded, too (Matthew 5:29, 30). As one reads through the entire sermon, it can be found that He covered everything about human life and relationships (read Matthew 5–Matthew 7:27).

Read Matthew 7:1–5. In what ways is the great controversy described as real in these verses? For example, how is the struggle between good and evil shown here?

“ ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged.’ Do not think yourself better than other men, and set yourself up as their judge. Since you cannot understand everything, you cannot judge another person. In criticizing this person, you are passing sentence upon yourself. When you do, you show that you are a partner of Satan. The Lord says, ‘Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.’ This is our work.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 314.

When Jesus told His audience not to judge, He made two important points. The first is that the reason we judge others is because we do the very same thing we are criticizing (Matthew 7:1, 2). We take the attention off ourselves and ensure that everyone around us is looking at the person we criticize rather than at us.

The other point Jesus makes is that often the problem we find in our brother or sister is only a small part of the size of our own problem—a problem that we may not even know about. It is easy for us to find a piece of sawdust in their eye, but we are unable to see the great wooden beam in our own.

What is the difference between judging a person and judging the rightness or wrongness of their actions? Why is that a very important difference to make?

“I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS” (Matthew 28:20)

Matthew ends his Gospel story with some of the most encouraging words Jesus spoke: “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20, KJV). What should that mean to us in our own lives, in our own struggles, failures, and disappointments, and even when we feel that God has failed us?

It also is interesting that Matthew begins his Gospel by saying that God is with us. But first Matthew lists Jesus’ family line from King David. Then he tells the story of an angel visiting first Mary and then Joseph. Next, Matthew explains that the baby to be born would be “Immanuel,” God with us (Matthew 1:23, NIV).

God made the promise, “I will be with you,” several times in the Bible. He promised to be with Isaac (Genesis 26:24), with Jacob (Genesis 28:15), with Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:8, 19), and with the children of Israel (Isaiah 41:10; Isaiah 43:5). This promise was usually made during times of hardship and suffering when God’s words would have the most meaning.

Another verse uses almost the same words: “I will never leave you nor forsake [leave] you” (Hebrews 13:5, NKJV). Just a few verses later it adds, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, NKJV). This promise, too, is repeated several times. These words can be found when Moses hands leadership over to Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8). God also repeats these words to Joshua after the death of Moses: “I will not leave you nor forsake you” (Joshua 1:5, NKJV). When David passes on the kingdom to Solomon, he also tells Solomon that God will not leave nor forsake Solomon (1 Chronicles 28:20).

Jesus, who never changes, who is always with us, gave a strong promise to our early leaders of the faith. They faced hardship and trial. And they were about to start on the greatest challenge of their lives. But they were sure of God’s continued presence.

To the church of Christ at the end of time, these promises are important. Jesus’ promise of being with us to the very end goes along with His command for us to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. So, our goal is rescuing people, with God’s help, from ending up on the losing side in the great controversy.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Author Leon Wieseltier wrote about “one of the saddest stories in the world.” He told of an Englishman, named S.B., who had been blind from birth. However, the good news was that, at 52 years old, S.B. had a corneal transplant that gave him sight. For the first time in his life, S.B. was able to see! It must have been very exciting for him to be able to see the world all around him, which he had not seen his whole life. However, Wieseltier then quotes the book in which he first read the story. He said that S.B. “found the world dull, and was upset by flaking paint and imperfect spots. . . . He noted more and more imperfections in things, and would examine small faults and marks in paintwork or wood. He found them upsetting, clearly expecting a more perfect world. He liked bright colors, but became depressed when the light faded. His depression became worse and worse. He slowly gave up active living, and three years later he died.”—Adapted from “Idealism³ and Blindness,” *New Republic*, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/113312>. Wow! It is hard to understand on one level, but at the same time, it is not. Our world is a damaged place. The great controversy has been going on here for about six thousand years. A 6,000-year war is going to leave a lot of wreckage in our world. We have tried hard to make this world better, but it does not seem to be heading in the right direction. In fact, it is only going to get worse. That is why we need the promise of redemption (salvation). This comes to us only from Christ’s victory in the great controversy. This victory was gained at the cross and is offered freely to us all.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What lessons can you learn for yourself from the story of S.B. mentioned in Friday’s study?
- ② As we saw in Tuesday’s study, those who said, “Lord, Lord, have we not” done this and that in Your name (Matthew 7:22, 23) were believers in Jesus. At the same time, notice the main point of their questions. Who were they focusing on? What were they focusing on? How does the answer here show why they were so deceived?
- ③ If you have a friend or family member doing something clearly wrong, how do you deal with this problem in a way that is not judgmental?

DEFINITIONS

3. idealism—the belief that a person can live by high standards.