

Jesus Desired Their Good



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jon. 3:4–4:6, Luke 19:38–42, Matt. 5:43–47, 1 Corinthians 13, Mark 8:22–25, Phil. 2:3–5, James 2:14–17.*

Memory Text: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (*Matthew 23:37*).

On Sabbath morning, during Sabbath School and worship service, skateboarders can often be seen rolling past the main doors of a local Seventh-day Adventist church.

Why? Because this church meets in a community youth center facility right next to a skateboard park. And if you thought these skateboarders were an unexpected annoyance, think again.

Instead, in an effort to curb the rising youth crime rate, the government in their city built the park to provide a place for its youth to engage in wholesome recreation. When the youth center and skateboard park were finished, the government wanted a church congregation to hold its worship services in the community youth center facility. The community leaders felt that the presence of a church would have a positive moral influence on the youth who used the park. They invited several churches of various Christian denominations, but only one accepted, the church that had Sabbath School and worship on Saturday morning.

These Adventist church members were excited about moving into the center, for the skateboarders were part of the group they wanted to reach.

The local church's definition of “church” is a community that does not exist for itself. This should be the definition for all our churches as well.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 13.

Jonah in Nineveh

Read Jonah 3:4–4:6. What serious attitude problem does this prophet have?

In Jonah 4, the prophet Jonah sits down east of the great city of Nineveh. He has delivered the message of doom that God has entrusted to him. He reflects on his journey, his reluctance to come to Nineveh, his runaway tactics, God's insistence in getting Jonah back on mission, the three-day episode in the fish, and the long journey inland from the coast. And for what? *For God to turn around and show His grace on these despicable people?* The people repented, but Jonah now feels betrayed. He feels dishonored and used. His hope had been that the destruction of this heathen city of 120,000 inhabitants would show God's preference for His chosen people and vindicate Jonah's hatred for the Ninevites.

Read Luke 19:38–42. What is happening here, and what is Jesus' attitude toward the city of Jerusalem?

Eight hundred years after Jonah, Jesus rides on a donkey over the crest of a hill overlooking Jerusalem. Shouts of praise to the "King who comes in the name of the Lord" are heard, along with echoes of hope declaring " 'peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' " (*Luke 19:38, NIV*). In the midst of this triumphal entry, as Jesus approaches the city, He stops and weeps, saying, " 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace' " (*Luke 19:42, NIV*).

Note the contrast. Jonah reluctantly obeyed the command of God, caring little for the good of the inhabitants of Nineveh. Jesus approaches Jerusalem with one burden on His heart: that they might have the salvation He offers, and at such a high cost.

Two cities: Nineveh and Jerusalem. Two messengers: Jonah and Jesus. The difference is obvious. Jesus exemplifies the selfless, caring attitude that desires the good of the people. May we, through God's grace, reveal that same attitude as Jesus did toward the lost.

How might selfishness play into the attitude that leaves someone unconcerned about the salvation of others?

The “Anyway” Principle

A leper approaches Jesus and begs for healing. Conventional wisdom says that this man should be isolated. Jesus, the clean One, touches him and heals him *anyway* (*Matt. 8:1–4*). Peter denies Jesus three times during His trial (*John 18*). After the Resurrection, having searched Peter’s heart, Jesus reinstates him into His service *anyway* (*John 21*). God’s church in Corinth is unappreciative of Paul’s authority and influence. Paul serves them *anyway* (*2 Cor. 12:14, 15*).

This principle of “anyway” or “in spite of” is essential for revealing the character of the One who desires their good.

“Millions upon millions of human souls ready to perish, bound in chains of ignorance and sin, have never so much as heard of Christ’s love for them. Were our condition and theirs to be reversed, what would we desire them to do for us? All this, so far as lies in our power, we are under the most solemn obligation to do for them. Christ’s rule of life, by which every one of us must stand or fall in the judgment, is, ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.’ Matthew 7:12.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 640.

This “golden rule” is foundational to a mind-set of ministry that thinks first of what is good for the ones we are serving instead of what benefits us.

Read Matthew 5:43–47; Luke 6:27, 35; 23:34. What crucial point here has Jesus revealed to us in regard to our attitude toward a certain class of people?

Jesus is calling us to show love and be kind to people “in spite of” the fact that they hate you or are your enemies. Notice, too, that Jesus links these acts and attitude with the character of God Himself. “ ‘But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked’ ” (*Luke 6:35, NIV*).

How do we understand the idea that God is “kind to the ungrateful and wicked”? (How does this answer, for example, the question “Why do the wicked sometimes prosper?”) How does Romans 2:4 play into the picture as well?

Love Never Fails

According to Jesus, the two greatest commandments are love to God and love to neighbor (*Luke 10:27, 28*). He also showed us who our neighbors are (*Luke 10:29–37*). No question, too, that Jesus' life from beginning to end was an expression of the pure love of God, who Himself is love (*1 John 4:16*). Thus, if we are to reflect the character of God, if we are to help reveal to others the reality of God and what He is like, we are to love.

Think about it another way. One of the greatest “excuses” that people have used to reject Jesus and Christianity as a whole has been professed Christians themselves.

What are some examples you can find in history, or even today, of how “Christians,” or at least people bearing the name “Christian,” have done some terrible deeds, sometimes even in the name of Jesus? Does not even the book of Daniel (*see Dan. 7:24, 25 or Rom. 2:24*) warn about this?

It's no wonder that many people through the ages, and even today, have been turned off by Christianity as a whole. Thus the imperative to reveal Christ to others through our own lives should be stronger than ever. And nothing can do this more powerfully than the kind of love expressed by Jesus Himself being expressed in our own lives as well.

Read 1 Corinthians 13. What does Paul say love is? What does he say love isn't? What does he say love does? What does he say love doesn't do? In short, how is love to be expressed in our lives as Christians, and how does love fit in with how we are to be witnesses to our community? More important, what changes do you need to make in order to reveal this kind of love?

The Second Touch

Read Mark 8:22–25. What spiritual lesson can we learn from the fact that Jesus’ first healing touch didn’t fully heal the blind man?

After Jesus “spat” on the man’s eyes, He touched him and asked, “ ‘Do you see anything?’ ” (*Mark 8:23, NIV*). Why did Jesus “spit” on his eyes? Ancient literature indicates examples of the use of saliva by physicians. This miracle resembles somewhat the healing of the deaf and mute man in Decapolis not long before that. (*Read Mark 7:31–37.*) However, unlike all His other recorded healing miracles, the cure for the blind man was performed in two stages.

Reread Mark 8:23, 24. How do you understand the man’s answer to the question “ ‘Do you see anything?’ ”?

“ ‘I see people; they look like trees walking around’ ” (*Mark 8:24, NIV*). That is, he could distinguish them from trees only by their motion. In a spiritual sense, how could we apply this incident to our own lives? It might be that after Jesus gives us spiritual sight, we are not totally restored. We might see people as “trees,” as objects. This could mean that we still are blind to them as real people with real needs. They are items, numbers, objects that we want to join the church, maybe to boost our baptism count, or to make us look good. With such a self-serving attitude around them, many people are likely not to stay in such a church.

Reread Mark 8:25. In this case, why might Jesus have deliberately healed the man in two stages?

The context of this story is that just before this healing miracle Jesus was dealing with another kind of blindness: His disciples didn’t understand the meaning of His statement to “ ‘watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod’ ” (*Mark 8:15, NIV*). They thought it was because they didn’t have enough bread for their boat ride. Jesus called them blind: “ ‘Do you have eyes but fail to see?’ ” (*Mark 8:18, NIV*).

Not only people outside the church need Jesus’ healing touch. Inside the church there is blindness. Partially sighted church members who see people as statistics and objects will not care or notice that many new babes in Christ slip out the back door of the church. They need Jesus’ second touch so they will see everything more clearly and will come to love others as Jesus did.

The Other-Centered Church

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 2:3–5, NIV*).

In what ways should the principles expressed here rule our lives and impact how we relate, not just to church members, but to our community?

When He was on earth, Jesus wasn't thinking about Himself. His agenda was about desiring the good of others. Much of His ministry consisted of responding to interruptions, such as when Jairus interrupted Him with a request to rush to his house to heal his dying daughter. This interruption then was interrupted by a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. (*Read Mark 5:21–43.*)

Christ's church is His heart and hands on earth. Jesus loved people more than anything else, and a church that is truly His will do the same.

Churches have agendas and goals, and that's good. An unconditional love for human beings will sometimes lead us to get out of our preconceived agendas, especially if those agendas distract from expressing God's love to others. For many churches, baptisms are high on the agenda. Baptisms are wonderful. Baptisms fulfill Matthew 28:19. But what is your church's motivation for baptisms? Is it self-serving? Is it to make the church look good and bring accolades to its pastor? Or is it because your church genuinely wants people in your community to enjoy the abundant life found by accepting Christ (*John 10:10*) and to accept *everything* that He offers because you wish the best for them?

One church was running a much-needed soup kitchen in a depressed area of town. The pastor was heard saying, “We must close this soup kitchen, because no baptisms are coming from it.” Another congregation had just built a new church building. They were very proud of it. When the pastor suggested inviting the community to come inside the church for such events as Vacation Bible School or health screenings, to expose people to the environment of the church, the *first* consideration was fear that the new carpet would get dirty and worn. And the new bathrooms might get defaced. Contrast these two churches with the church that was meeting in the skateboard park.

Read over the verses for today. How well do they reflect your own attitude toward others? How can we learn to experience the death to self that is needed to reveal these characteristics in our lives?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pp. 17–28, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “‘One Thing Thou Lackest,’” pp. 518–523, in *The Desire of Ages*; “A Social Life,” pp. 186–188, 190–192, 194–196, in *My Life Today*.

“In order to reach all classes, we must meet them where they are; for they will seldom seek us of their own accord. Not alone from the pulpit are the hearts of men and women touched by divine truth. Christ awakened their interest by going among them as one who desired their good. He sought them at their daily avocations and manifested an unfeigned interest in their temporal affairs.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 186. How true that many people today, for various reasons, will “seldom seek us of their own accord.” Just as Jesus came down and reached us where we are, we need to do the same for others. On one level, this shouldn’t be so hard. There are so many people out there with so many needs. The world is a hurt and broken place with hurt and broken people who, in some cases, simply crave someone to listen to them, someone to talk to, someone who cares. And of course, as a church body, we should be able to give them to some degree the physical help that they need. We need to be careful not to be guilty of what James warned about: having faith but not the deeds to reveal it. How interesting, too, that he expressed that warning, not in the context of diet or dress or personal behavior, but in the context of helping the needy. (See *James 2:14–17*.) Anyone can say that they have faith. How we respond to our “neighbor” is the true measure of that faith.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read James 2:14–17. How can you help your church make sure that it is not guilty of doing what James warns about here?
- 2 Think about some people in the Bible who demonstrated unselfish and caring service. For example: “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor” (*Acts 9:36, NIV*). What is your church doing to help others in modern “Joppa”?
- 3 It’s easy to do good things when you are lauded and praised and held up as an example of “good works” or the like. But what about doing things for others that no one knows about, that no one hears about, and that no one (other than perhaps the persons helped) even cares about?
- 4 Someone asked a Christian, “What is the purpose of your life?” He responded, “To give, and ask nothing in return.” How well does this answer encapsulate what our attitude as Christians should be?

Lost and Found: Part 2

At last Denise arrived in northwestern Rwanda. There she met a kind man and his wife who befriended her. When she told them her story, they urged her to stop wandering and stay with them. They invited her into their home and shared their food. They treated her well and spoke to her with love. They told her about Jesus and how much He loves her. She learned that they were Seventh-day Adventists.

Denise loved these people who wanted to help find her family. But when they found no living relative, they asked Denise's permission to adopt her. She agreed. Finally, she had a home again and someone to care for her.

The couple often talked to Denise about God. They introduced her to Jesus, and soon she accepted Him as her Savior.

But often at night Denise wondered about her birth family. Her adoptive father took Denise to Kigali, the capital city. He introduced her to the manager of the Adventist radio station, the Voice of Hope Radio, and there she told her story. The announcer invited anyone who knew anything about Denise's family to call in.

Denise learned that her father had died in a refugee camp. But she never learned what had happened to her mother. She found out that she has other relatives in Rwanda, and one day she would like to meet them. But she is torn. She loves her adoptive parents and the God they taught her to love. "They have given me spiritual roots and a hope for the future," she says.

Although her earthly father is dead, Denise knows that her heavenly Father loves her unconditionally. It is He who kept her alive as she wandered across several countries in search of a home and a family. "So many people perished during the genocide, and yet God preserved me," she says. "He saved me when I didn't even know Him, and He brought me from death to new life in Jesus."

The country of Rwanda has recovered significantly since the genocide. A new School of Medicine at the Adventist University of Central Africa, located in Kigali, will train qualified health professionals to serve in a comprehensive health ministry in a region of the world where the doctor-to-patient ratio fluctuates between 1 to 16,000 to 1 to 24,200. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help to build dormitories and a cafeteria for the medical students. Thank you for giving.