

Living *the* Advent Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 18:1–8; Matthew 24–25; 1 Cor. 15:12–19; Eccles. 8:14; 12:13, 14; Rev. 21:1–5; 22:1–5.*

Memory Text: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (*1 Corinthians 15:58, NKJV*).

Jesus announced the kingdom of God as a present reality that we can be part of today. He sent His disciples to make the same announcement and to enact His kingdom through preaching the gospel and by serving others; that is, by giving as freely as they had received (*see Matt. 10:5–8*).

But Jesus also was clear that His kingdom was a different kind of kingdom: “not of this world” (*John 18:36*)—and yet to come in full. By His incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection, the kingdom of God was inaugurated, but Jesus also looked forward to a time His kingdom would fully replace the kingdoms of this world, and God’s reign would be made complete.

By definition, Adventists—those who await this coming and this kingdom—are people of hope. But this hope is not only about a future new world. While hope looks to the future, hope transforms the present now. With such hope, we live in the present as we expect to in the future, and we begin working to make a difference now in ways that fit with how we expect the world will one day be.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 14.

“How Long, O LORD?”

Throughout the Bible’s story, there is a repeated call from God’s people—particularly those experiencing slavery, exile, oppression, poverty, or other injustice or tragedy—for God to intervene. The slaves in Egypt, the Israelites in Babylon, and many others called out to God to see and hear their suffering and to right these wrongs. And the Bible offers significant examples of God’s actions to rescue and restore His people, at times even taking revenge on their oppressors and enemies.

But these rescues were usually short-lived, and the various prophets continued to point forward to a final intervention, when God would put an end to evil and lift up the downtrodden. At the same time, these prophets continued the cry, “How long, O LORD?” For example, the angel of the Lord asked about the exile of the Israelites, “LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy?” (*Zech. 1:12, NIV*).

The Psalms are full of laments about the apparent prosperity and good fortune of the wicked while the righteous are abused, exploited, and poor. The psalmist repeatedly calls on God to intervene, trusting that the world is not presently ordered in the way God created it or desires it, and taking up the cry of the prophets and oppressed, “How long, O LORD?” (*see, for example, Ps. 94:3–7*).

In a sense, injustice is more difficult to endure among those who believe in a just God who desires justice for all His people. The people of God will always have a sense of impatience about evil in the world—and God’s seeming inaction is another source of impatience. Thus, the sometimes harsh questions of the prophets: “How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save?” (*Hab. 1:2, NIV*).

A similar cry is taken up in the New Testament, where even creation itself is portrayed as groaning for God to rescue and re-create (*see Rom. 8:19–22*). In Revelation 6:10, this cry—“How long, O Lord?”—is taken up on behalf of those who have been martyred for their faith in God. But it is the same cry, calling on God to intervene on behalf of His oppressed and persecuted people.

Read Luke 18:1–8. What is Jesus saying about God’s response to the repeated cries and prayers of His people for Him to act in their behalf? How is this linked to the need for faith?

A Certain Kind of Hope

Religion has often been criticized for a tendency to draw believers away from life here and now toward some better afterlife. The criticism is that the focus on another realm becomes a form of sanctified escapism and renders the believer of less benefit to the world and to society. At times, believers have left themselves open to such criticism, sometimes even cultivating, preaching, and practicing these kinds of attitudes.

And, too, we have terrible examples of those in power telling the poor and oppressed just to accept their sad lot now because, when Jesus returns, all will be made right.

Yes, our world is a fallen, broken, and tragic place—and there is nothing wrong or misplaced in longing for when God will set the world right; when He will bring an end to injustice, pain, and sorrow; and when He will replace the current disorder with His glorious and righteous kingdom. After all, without that hope, without that promise, we really have no hope at all.

In His sermon on the end of the world (*see Matthew 24 and 25*), Jesus spent the first half of His discourse detailing the need for escape, even getting to the point of saying that “ ‘if those days had not been cut short, no one would survive’ ” (*Matt. 24:22, NIV*). But this is more an introduction to His explanation of the significance of these promises of God. To focus solely—or even primarily—on the “escape” aspect of the Christian hope for the future is to miss some of the deeper points Jesus was making.

Read Matthew 24 and 25. What are the most important points from your reading of this sermon of Jesus? How would you summarize Jesus’ instructions for how we are to live as we wait for His return?

What we believe about the future has important implications for how we live now. A healthy reliance on the promises of God about His future for our world should be the catalyst for energetic engagement, the spark for a life that is rich and deep and makes a difference to others.

How can and should the hope and promise of Jesus’ return impact how we live now, especially in the context of helping those in need?

Resurrection Hope

The Christian hope in the second coming of Jesus is not just about looking forward to a bright future. For the early Christians, the bodily resurrection of Jesus gave the promise of His return a solid reality. If He could come back from the dead—which they had witnessed for themselves—He would surely come back to complete the project of removing sin and its effects and renewing the world (see *1 Cor. 15:22, 23*).

For the apostle Paul, the resurrection was the key element of the Advent hope. He was prepared to stake the credibility of everything he preached on this crowning miracle in the story of Jesus: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile” (*1 Cor. 15:17, NIV*). Think about his words here and how important the resurrection of Christ is to all that we hope for.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–19. How would you explain to an interested nonbeliever why the truth of the Resurrection is so pivotal to Christian hope?

Witnessing the resurrected Jesus transformed the first disciples. As we have seen, Jesus had previously sent them out to announce and enact the kingdom of God (see *Matt. 10:5–8*), but Jesus’ death shattered their courage and smashed their hopes. Their later commission (see *Matt. 28:18–20*), given by the resurrected Jesus and powered by the coming of the Holy Spirit (see *Acts 2:1–4*), set them on the path of changing the world and living out the kingdom that Jesus had established.

Freed from the power and fear of death, the early believers lived and shared courageously in the name of Jesus (see, for example, *1 Cor. 15:30, 31*). The evil that brings death is the same evil that brings suffering, injustice, poverty, and oppression in all their forms. Yet, because of Jesus and His victory over death, all of this will one day end. “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (*1 Cor. 15:26, NIV*).

In the end, no matter whom we help now, they will all eventually die anyway. What does this harsh truth teach us about how important it is to let others know of the hope they can find in the death and resurrection of Jesus?

Judgment Hope

Read Ecclesiastes 8:14. In what ways do you see the stark and powerful reality of what is written here?

While suffering, oppression, and tragedy are hard enough to bear in their own right, the injury or insult is harder still if it appears to be meaningless or unnoticed. The possible meaninglessness of sorrow is heavier than its initial burden. A world without record or final justice is the ultimate in cruel absurdity. No wonder atheist writers in the twentieth century lamented about what they believed was the “absurdity” of the human condition. With no hope of justice, no hope of judgment, no hope of things being made right, ours would indeed be an absurd world.

But the cry of Ecclesiastes 8:14 is not the end of the story. At the end of his protests, Solomon takes a sudden turn. In the midst of his laments about meaninglessness, he says, essentially: *Hold on a minute—God is going to judge. So, everything is not meaningless; in fact, now everything and everyone matters.*

Read Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14. What does this tell us about just how important all that we do here is?

The hope of judgment comes down to what one believes about the core nature of God, life, and the world in which we live. As we have seen, the Bible insists that we live in a world that God created and loves, but a world that has gone wrong and in which God is working toward His plan for re-creation, all through the life and death of Jesus. God’s judgment is a key part of His setting our world right. For those on the receiving end of so many of the world’s wrongs—those who have been marginalized, brutalized, oppressed, and exploited—the promise of judgment is surely good news.

What does it mean to you to know that, one day, and in ways we can’t imagine, the justice that we so much long for now will finally come? How can we draw hope from this promise?

No More Tears or Pain

Read Revelation 21:1–5 and Revelation 22:1–5 and spend some time trying to imagine what life will be like as described here. Why is it difficult to imagine life without sin, death, pain, and tears?

The Bible’s descriptions of our life after sin are unquestionably wonderful and glorious and no doubt barely represent what is awaiting us. Even in these verses, the descriptions are almost as much about what won’t be there as what will be. When this world is all we have known, it can be hard to imagine life without pain and suffering, death and fear, injustice and poverty.

Not only is there no more of these things, but this description adds a personal touch: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes” (*Rev. 21:4, NIV*). In the context of those who have been saved, God’s compassion for those who have suffered throughout human history reaches a climax in this single sentence. Not only does He bring an end to their suffering, but He personally wipes away their tears.

Battered and scarred by a life of sin and a world of injustice and tragedy, we can see in the book of Revelation hints at a process of healing for all of us who have been victims of sin in many different ways. Describing the tree of life, John explains that “the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (*Rev. 22:2, NIV*). Again, God shows His understanding of, and compassion for, what it has meant to be human, to feel, experience, witness, and even participate in the evil of this world. His plan for re-creating our world includes restoring and healing each of us.

Until then, we seek to be all that we can be in Christ, doing our part, as faltering and small as our parts might be, to minister to those around us who need what we have to offer. Whatever it is we can do—kind words, a warm meal, medical help, dental work, clothing, counseling—we should be doing with the kind, self-abnegating, self-denying, self-sacrificing love that Jesus manifested when He was here.

Of course, the world is still going to get worse and worse, despite our best efforts. Jesus knew that; yet, this truth didn’t stop Him from ministering to others, and it shouldn’t stop us, either.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Called to Reach a Higher Standard,” pp. 309–322, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “Desolation of the Earth,” pp. 653–661, in *The Great Controversy*.

“When the voice of God turns the captivity of His people, there is a terrible awakening of those who have lost all in the great conflict of life. While probation continued they were blinded by Satan’s deceptions, and they justified their course of sin. The rich prided themselves upon their superiority to those who were less favored; but they had obtained their riches by violation of the law of God. They had neglected to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to deal justly, and to love mercy. . . . They have sold their souls for earthly riches and enjoyments, and have not sought to become rich toward God. The result is, their lives are a failure; their pleasures are now turned to gall, their treasures to corruption.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 654.

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Page 678.

Discussion Questions:

1 Explain how what you have studied this week demonstrates that life, here and now, matters. Compare this with the belief some hold that we need not worry about this life and this world because God will destroy it all and start again. How can we be careful, too, not to use this truth of the promise of new existence to neglect those in need (after all, in the end, God will make it all right)? Even more important, how can we make sure we don’t become one of those who have used this truth to exploit others?

2 The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Bible prophecy expects evil, trouble, and suffering to increase as we get nearer to the return of Jesus. When such things happen, we often refer to Matthew 24. How should we view these tragedies in light of Matthew 25?

Summary: Our God will not allow evil to continue forever. The Bible’s great hope is the return of Jesus to bring an end to evil, to heal injustice and create a new world as it was meant to be. Built on the resurrection of Jesus, this hope transforms today and gives courage to our service for God and others as we wait for His return.

TV Draws People

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

As a child in New Zealand, Coralie Schofield was warned about the potential dangers of television and cautioned to stay away.

Today, she is surprised—and overjoyed—that people are flocking to Seventh-day Adventist churches across the country because of television.

“It’s the most humbling experience to see. It’s just television,” said Coralie, who has a front-row seat as the wife of Neale Schofield, manager of Hope Channel New Zealand, the local affiliate of the Adventist Church’s international channel.

“When I was growing up in the Adventist Church, my television viewing was cautiously monitored,” said Coralie, who oversees correspondence for Hope Channel. “But now viewing choices have expanded. You’ve got an Adventist channel that is witnessing 24/7.”

Viewers approach Coralie and her husband at Sabbath worship services around New Zealand. At one church, an older couple told how an adult daughter had been flipping through the channels and stopped on Hope Channel. Soon she was watching regularly, and she told her parents and sister about the channel. The whole family began to watch.

“Now the four are baptized,” Coralie said.

At another church, Coralie heard about a woman who walked in off the street one Sabbath and asked for Bible studies. When the pastor arrived at her home, he found 11 women waiting to study the Bible. The woman had invited 10 friends. Half of them have been baptized now.

Hope Channel began free-to-air broadcasts across New Zealand in 2016 with help from a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Today it has a monthly viewership of about 200,000 people, or 5 percent of the population, according to market researcher Nielsen. The Adventist Church has about 12,000 members in New Zealand, a country with a highly secularized society where the church has struggled to make inroads.

Viewers surface in unexpected places. While flying domestically, Neale Schofield was working on his laptop, and a fellow passenger saw the Hope Channel logo on his screen.

“Are you associated with Hope Channel?” the stranger asked.



The man introduced himself as the pastor of another Christian denomination in Auckland and said he and his 15- and 18-year-old daughters watched only Hope Channel.

“I just find it very humbling to be part of the process—to meet these people and see the absolute joy on their faces,” Coralie said. “It is like they’ve come home.”

Part I: Overview

When considering the unprecedented growth of Christianity in the first three centuries, historian Rodney Stark concludes: “The power of Christianity lay not in its promise of otherworldly compensations for suffering in this life, as has so often been proposed. No, the crucial change that took place in the third century was the rapidly spreading awareness of a faith that delivered potent antidotes to life’s miseries here and now! The truly revolutionary aspect of Christianity lay in moral imperatives such as ‘*Love one’s neighbor as oneself,*’ ‘*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,*’ ‘*It is more blessed to give than to receive,*’ and ‘*When you did it to the least of my brethren, you did it unto me.*’”¹

As we study this week’s lesson, “Living the Advent Hope,” we are challenged to live each day with a burning hope for God’s coming kingdom, while bringing those kingdom values to bear in our lives and the lives of those whom we serve. We empathize with the prophetic cry for a hastened return of Christ in His kingdom. While we wait for the kingdom of glory, we are reminded of the opportunities for ministry right now, as we let Christ live out His life within us.

Teacher’s Aims:

- Ask your students to consider and discuss the following questions: What motivates you and your church in this unjust world while you wait for the Second Coming?
- How are you using the time you have as Christ’s coming grows closer with every passing day?

Part II: Commentary

Scripture: Read together in class Titus 2:11–14. This passage outlines two kingdoms: the kingdom of grace, and the kingdom of glory. Ask the class the following:

1. Explain what we mean by “kingdom.”
Answer: A government or territory that has a king as its head; it contains a throne, citizens, laws, etc.
2. What is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven?
Answer: It is the domain over which the sovereignty of God or Christ extends, whether in heaven or on earth, as demonstrated by

¹ Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 30.

the words, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (*Matt. 6:10*). It also is the gracious rule of Christ the King in your heart or life.

3. What is the kingdom of grace?
Answer: The kingdom of grace is a phase of God’s rule in which His extended favor toward us (His grace) enables us to become His children and citizens of the kingdom. Our access to this kingdom is through faith in Jesus as Savior, Lord, and King. The kingdom of grace existed before “the foundation of the world” (*1 Pet. 1:20*). This kingdom is now, and leads to the kingdom of glory.
4. What is the kingdom of glory?
Answer: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory . . . then shall he sit upon the *throne* of his glory” (*Matt. 25:31, emphasis supplied*). The kingdom of glory begins at the second coming of Jesus and the final judgment—the *not yet*.
5. Read Matthew 3:1–12 and Matthew 11:2–6. What was John the Baptist expecting during the first coming of Jesus? Why was he confused with Jesus’ approach and mission?
Answer: “Like the Saviour’s disciples, John the Baptist did not understand the nature of Christ’s kingdom. He expected Jesus to take the throne of David; and as time passed, and the Saviour made no claim to kingly authority, John become perplexed and troubled. . . . Like the prophet Elijah, in whose spirit and power he had come to Israel, he looked for the Lord to reveal Himself as a God that answereth by fire. . . . And now from his dungeon he [John] watched for the Lion of the tribe of Judah to cast down the pride of the oppressor, and to deliver the poor and him that cried. But Jesus seemed to content Himself with gathering disciples about Him, and healing and teaching the people. He was eating at the tables of the publicans, while every day the Roman yoke rested more heavily upon Israel, while King Herod and his vile paramour worked their will, and the cries of the poor and suffering went up to heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 215. Therefore, John was confused.
6. What kingdom did Jesus come to live out during His first coming?
Answer: The kingdom of grace, with its wholistic restoration of humanity. The judgment was for His second coming—the ushering in of His kingdom of glory. Read and discuss some sample kingdom-of-grace passages in Mark 5:21–42 and Luke 19:1–10, et cetera. Also, see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 346–348, for background information.
7. Christ’s church must position itself to foster heaven on earth. Why

must the church do that *now*, while we wait for His coming?

Answer: In His prayer, Jesus said, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (*Matt. 6:10*). Again, read Matthew 25:31–46.

8. How is social action “a living witness to our soon-returning Lord”?

Answer: “When we take a stand for justice, compassion, and healing, we demonstrate the values of God’s coming Kingdom.”²

Illustration: Two “Kingdom” Illustrations:

1. Patricia in South Africa demonstrates coming kingdom-of-glory values, and the kingdom of grace now, as she lovingly cares for nearly 20 children who have contracted AIDS or have lost their parents to AIDS. She does this in her home. When asked why she does it, she replied, “I want them to have a little bit of the Second Coming now.” (How does this example of the kingdom of grace beautifully demonstrate the way the kingdom of glory will be?)
2. The following claim was advertised on the sides of a plumbing van in South Africa: “*There is no place too deep, too dark, or too dirty for us to handle.*”³ (How does this slogan aptly express the setting and the work of the kingdom of grace?)

Illustration: Some feel that any concern for ecology and caring for social needs is a waste of time because this world will be destroyed at the end of time anyway.

Some Christians today see this world as a sinking ship. Not only do they see no use in charting a course on such a dire vessel, they see no sense in bailing out the water and plugging up the leaks in order to make the ship seaworthy again. Instead, they spend their time on life rafts, at a safe distance, warning the ship’s passengers that the vessel will soon sink. These doomsayers view any attempt to repair the ship (i.e., improve social conditions in the world) as pointless because Christ will destroy the present world order at His Coming.

Comment on the “sanctified escapism” illustrated above. Is such a philosophical outlook biblically defensible? Why, or why not?

Scripture: Miah Arnold wrote an article in *The Michigan Quarterly Review* (vol. 50, no. 1 [Winter 2011]) entitled “You Owe Me.” It describes the total nonsensical injustice of the suffering of innocent, dying children

² General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department, “Keys to Adventist Community Services,” December 22, 2008, p. 6, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54c685b3e4b0f8fbaf030c60/t/5694095d9cadb6333162cda8/1452542301494/ACSI+LEAFLET-HANDBOOK+12-22-08.pdf>.

³ Darryl Denney, “No Life Is Too Messy for Jesus to Handle,” *Messy Grace*, Center Christian Church, September 26, 2017, <https://www.centerchristianchurch.org/single-post/2017/09/27/No-Life-is-Too-Messy-for-Jesus-to-Handle>.

in the Anderson Cancer Center in Texas. Arnold writes, “I was, like everybody else, trying to make sense of what is nonsensical.”⁴

Discuss the meaning of this statement by Clifford Goldstein, concerning the tragedies in the world—the *nonsense of evil*: “However bad these tragedies, it would be worse if there were sense to them.”⁵ Ask the class: Why is that so?

Read this statement from *The Great Controversy* to your class and discuss: “It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence. . . . Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 492, 493.

Read and discuss 1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10, Revelation 21:4, and other passages the class can think of that indicate that, in His designated time, God will surely bring justice and do away with sin.

Currently this sinful world is full of oppression, suffering, and sadness. While we wait for the designated time of Jesus’ second coming, let us continue the process of undoing the devil’s work as did Jesus (*1 John 3:8*). His body, the church, has been sent into the world to “preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound . . . and they shall repair the waste cities. . . . But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God” (*Isa. 61:1–4, 6*).

Part III: Life Application

To be an Adventist Christian who daily lives in the light of the Advent Hope means to avoid two extremes: (1) *overexcitement* about our expectancy of Christ’s second coming that writes off the present world as doomed, and therefore militates against our putting forth any effort into working for the good of the society in which we live; and (2) *indifference* to Christ’s advent that makes the present world the main focus for which to live and work. For these indifferent ones, the present world is not a *waiting room* to the coming world, but a *living room* to occupy comfortably in a relaxed manner.

Invite the class members to discuss the following: In which “room” do you find yourselves? As you actively wait for the “kingdom of glory,” how is your church progressing in creating a “kingdom of grace” in the “waiting room” (inside and outside of your church) that points to the “kingdom of glory”?

In the “kingdom of glory,” there will be a “tree of life” with leaves that are for “the healing of the nations” (*Rev. 22:2*; also *Ezek. 47:12*). Why

⁴ Miah Arnold, “You Owe Me,” *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Winter 2011, quoted in Clifford Goldstein, “It Makes No Sense,” *Adventist Review*, April 18, 2013, p. 16.

⁵ Arnold, “You Owe Me,” *Michigan Quarterly Review*.

would nations need to be healed if evil has been wiped out of existence? As does the healing river of Ezekiel 47:9, the water of life produces healing wherever it goes—even in heaven! Invite class members to share stories of how your church or other churches are a “health place” inside and outside.

Notes
