

The Least Of These: Lesson 7

Jesus & Those In Need

Memory Text: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18, 19)

Setting The Stage: Does anyone recall what we commemorated recently? It was the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission to the moon. It was an amazing success as astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were able to walk on the Moon as well as return to Earth.

But the greatest moment in the history was not when man walked on the moon, but when God walked on the Earth. His name was Jesus, Immanuel—God with us.

There are multiple reasons why Jesus came to Earth. One all-important reason (and they're all important) was to show what God is like. He did this by teaching, by His life, and His sacrifice. In Jesus we learn that God truly is love, and love always reveals itself in self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. This is what we see in Jesus healing ministry.

The prophets of the Old Testament foretold Jesus' life and ministry. Sadly, many who had knowledge of the Scriptures, misunderstood the purpose for the Messiah's arrival. They didn't know the real reason He had come. They were looking for a liberator from the yoke of Rome. He had come as liberator to the oppressed and to set free those held captive by sin.

Sunday – Mary's Song

Luke 1:46-55

We cannot imagine what Mary must have thought and felt when she was approached by the angel Gabriel and told that she would give birth, without knowing a man, to the Son of the Highest. Excitement, fear, anticipation, concern, wonder, intrigue; all must have been experienced by Mary. If she second-guesses what she has been told, her cousin Elizabeth affirms her special calling and responsibility.

Then, as if granted the gift of inspiration, Mary sings a song of praise and adoration, a song considered one of the most sublime hymns in all sacred literature, a lyric of exquisite beauty worthy of Mary's ancestor David. It has often been compared with

Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving for Samuel, and is reminiscent of the song of Moses (see Ex. 15), and that of Deborah and Barak (see Judges 5). **Luke 1:46-55.**

The poetic quality of the song becomes more impressive when it's printed in poetic form. It's divided into four stanzas:

1. Vs. 46-48. Here Mary thinks about herself—how she is feeling. She marvels that God has taken notice of her and passed by others.
2. Vs. 49, 50. Here Mary glorifies the power, holiness, and mercy of God.
3. Vs. 51-53. Here are presented in sharp contrast the character values esteemed by God and man. God's conception of what constitutes true greatness is the antithesis of man's estimation of greatness.
4. Vs. 54, 55. The song of Mary closes on a note of gratitude for God's eternal faithfulness to His chosen people.

According to the following verses, who does God have special regard for?

Luke 1:52, 53: "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty."

The reference here is particularly to oppressors. Perhaps Mary had the cruel tyrant Herod in mind who murdered not only thousands of Jews but even his closest relatives. Contemporary Jewish literature also reveals that the common people often suffered intensely from economic oppression.

Luke 1:32, 33 depict Mary's Son as a ruler. He would be given a throne and His kingdom would last forever. **What type of kingdom would Jesus rule over?** Would it be a kingdom of injustice and cruelty like Rome, or would it be a kingdom of justice and grace? Jesus' life and ministry speaks loudly that it is a kingdom of grace. His church is to be an expression of His kingdom. And what that looks like is seen in the life, ministry, and death of Jesus.

Monday – Jesus' Mission Statement

Luke 4:16-21; 7:18-23

Most successful business and companies carry a clear mission statement. Apple – "The best computing experience through innovative hardware, software, and internet offerings." Google – "To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." Ritz-Carlton – "The genuine care and comfort of our guests." Amazon – "Every book, ever printed, in any language, all available in less than 60 seconds." Nike – "Crush Adidas."

What was Jesus' mission statement when He walked the Earth?

Luke 4:18, 19: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

What was so significant about the phrase “acceptable year”? It was reminiscent of the year of jubilee when slaves were freed, debts were canceled, and land was given back to its original owner (see Lev. 25). But Jesus left out the words, “the day of vengeance of our God,” words that to the patriotic Jew was the climax of the entire passage. To them, salvation was for the Jews (because of nationality rather than submission to God) and retribution for the Gentiles. But Jesus wanted them to understand He had come for salvation not judgment. He wanted them to understand this ought to be their mission too.

What evidence did Jesus use to answer the uncertainty of John the Baptist regarding His Messiahship?

Luke 7:22: “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them’.”

“It is worthy to note that the supreme evidence Christ offered of His divinity was the perfect adaptation of His ministry to the need of human suffering and lost humanity.” (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 760)

If the followers of Jesus engage in a ministry of holistic healing, will we be able to reach people where they are at as Jesus did when He walked this planet? How do we properly blend the preaching of the everlasting gospel with acts of mercy? However we go about it, it’s imperative that it be done and that we remember a ministry of healing isn’t an end in and of itself. It’s a means to an end, and that is salvation in Jesus.

Tuesday – Jesus Heals

Matthew 14:14; 12:15-21

The gospels record about 26 healing occurrences that Jesus performed. We must be quick to remember that, according to John, “there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.” Jesus healed the sick, the deaf, the dumb, the leper, the paralyzed, and He raised the dead. The first recorded healing was that of the nobleman’s son, and the last was restoring Malchus’ ear.

What motivated Jesus to heal? Was it the desire for fame? Was it the need to feel good that He had done some good things throughout the day?

Matthew 14:14: “And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.”

Compassion was the great motivator for Christ. If compassion urges you to act, don't ignore it; do something about it.

What was Jesus' ultimate goal in healing people? Matthew 12:15-21 (see also Isa. 42:1-4). Christ's intention in His miracles was to prove Himself the Messiah, and therefore to bring men to believe on Him. Jesus didn't do His work to receive the applause of men, or to be seen of men. He set an example so that we would be the reverse of those who go about doing good to be seen of others.

The scope of the quoted Isaiah passage is to show how mild and quiet, and yet how successful Jesus would be in his undertaking. Jesus didn't come to push Himself on people, but He would carefully handle (like a box that contains fragile goods) those who needed help and healing.

Of interest is the use of the word “justice” in this passage. What does it mean? When we compare this verse with Isa. 61:1-3, we learn that “justice” is Christ bringing healing and liberating souls in sin. So “justice” is another word for salvation. This is the justice God's people ought to be involved in. One might be tempted to get on the band wagon of certain “social justice” causes, and some would certainly be right to do so, but the church must always remember that her power is not in politics or in marches, but her power is in proclaiming the acceptable year of our Lord.

Wednesday – Clearing The Temple

Matthew 21:12-16

When we think of the fruit of the Spirit, what attributes usually come to mind? Typically, the more passive virtues of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and meekness are thought of. However, the fruit of the Spirit equally includes active virtues as well—faith, courage, fortitude, and so on.

So should it be surprising to find Jesus engaging in an action that exhibits these virtues?

Matthew 21:12-16: “Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, ‘It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.’ Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’

they were indignant and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes. Have you never read, Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise'?"

Granted, faith, courage, and fortitude can be exhibited in other ways as we will see in Thursday's lesson, but what was it that led Jesus to drive out the moneychangers, and what was He preparing for?

Although Jesus never lent encouragement to the wrong ideas the Jews held regarding His kingdom, Jesus proceeded to act in the role of Messiah-King in order that everyone might have full opportunity to understand the significance of the crucifixion.

The scene took place in the court of the Gentiles. The Temple market sold various kinds of animals and birds required for sacrifice, together with cereal, salt, incense, and oil. This market was considered a necessary convenience for the pilgrims who came from great distances, and who thus found it impractical to bring their own sacrifices.

The noise, commotion, and sharp bargaining carried on must have offended the religious consciousness of those who worshipped God. Strangely, this traffic was allowed by the Temple authorities, who made a handsome profit from it. But those who carried it on revealed that they had a gross misconception of the character of God and the requirements He made of those who love and serve Him.

By making the sacred symbols of the Lamb of God a source of personal profit, the rulers were making sacred things common and robbing all the worshippers of a knowledge of the character and requirements of God; and particularly were they robbing the Gentile worshippers of the opportunity to know God as He is. In their spirit of greed the dignitaries of the Temple were no better than thieves.

As Jesus went to work healing those who now flocked to the Temple courts, He gave a practical demonstration of the truth that the Temple had been ordained of God to serve man's needs, not his greed. For a brief time was in control of the Temple, and during that time demonstrated, in part, how these sacred precincts should be used. He had come to Earth that men "might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10); not that they might make sacrifice more abundantly or make profits more abundantly.

How can we do our part to make sure our local churches never become places that need what the temple needed in Christ's day? How can we avoid those spiritual dangers?

Thursday - The Cross Of Christ

Isaiah 53:3-6

“That God is a God who sees and hears the cries of the poor and oppressed is comforting. That God is a God who, in Jesus, has experienced and endured the worst of our world’s inhumanity, oppression, and injustice is astounding. Despite all the compassion and goodness Jesus demonstrated in His life and ministry, His death came as a result of hatred, jealousy, and injustice.

“From Jesus’ anguished prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane to His arrest, “trials,” torture, mocking, crucifixion, and death, He endured a grueling ordeal of pain, cruelty, evil, and oppressive power. All of this was exacerbated by the innocence, purity, and goodness of the One who suffered it...Through the lens of salvation’s story, we see the beauty of Jesus’ sacrifice for us, but we should not forget the brutality of the suffering and injustice He experienced.” (ASBG, Lesson 7)

Isaiah 53:3-6: “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

What do these words tell us about what happened to Jesus, the innocent suffering for the guilty? How does this help us understand what He went through on our behalf?

“It’s an amazing thought, but in Jesus, God knows what it feels like to be a victim of evil and injustice. The execution of an innocent man should be an outrage to any one of us; the murder of God even more so. God identified Himself with us in our broken and fallen condition so that we cannot doubt His empathy, compassion, and faithfulness (Heb. 4:15). What a revelation of the character of God!” (ABSG, Lesson 7)

In all that we do for the Lord we must always keep the death of Jesus at the center of our mission and purpose. Why? (1) Because His death was for all, therefore we must serve all and not be discriminate in our helping. (2) Because He was the just dying for the unjust, and therefore His death reminds us to be willing to give more of ourselves than what we might usually give (if our giving is nominal) in bringing salvation through Jesus to others. (3) Because He was unjustly treated, therefore we ought to treat all men with justice (Micah 6:8).

Friday - Summary

Good news to the poor, freedom for the oppressed, and healing for the broken were proclaimed as markers of the Messiah—and something Jesus demonstrated throughout His ministry. Yet, in His death, He also suffered the brunt of injustice and ultimately overcame the worst of fallen humanity and inhumanity. Thanks to His unjust death in our behalf, our sins can be forgiven, and we have the promise of eternal life