

Teaching the Disciples



SABBATH—MAY 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Mark 9:14–10:31.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘If you want to be first, you must be the very last. You must be the servant of everyone’ ” (Mark 9:35, NIV).

A MIXED-UP BUNCH. A Christian magazine once suggested how a team of counselors might have evaluated Jesus' disciples. “Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and has fits of temper. Andrew has no leadership abilities. James and John put their personal interests above company loyalty. Thomas shows a questioning attitude¹ that would probably destroy team spirit.

“We feel that it is our duty to tell You that Matthew has been blacklisted² by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus are rebels, and they both can become depressed easily.

“One of the candidates, however, shows great promise. He is a man of great abilities. . . . We recommend Judas Iscariot as Your controller³ and right-hand man.”—Adapted from *The Baptist Messenger*, Sept. 27, 1984.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What can cause us to be spiritual failures? How did the disciples show their spiritual failures? What did Jesus say about divorce? Why did Jesus treat children as He did? What important point did Jesus make about the dangers of wealth?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 14.

¹attitude—how you feel and think about something; the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of a person or group of people.

²blacklisted—not approved of.

³controller—a person who is in charge of money.

SUNDAY—MAY 8
A PUBLIC FAILURE
(Mark 9:14-32).

Peter wanted to stay on the mountain with Jesus, Elijah, and Moses (Mark 9:5). So he suggested that he build three shelters. How nice if Jesus could stay a while in that place of glorious light. But Jesus' mission called Him to leave the mountaintop and return to the valley. His mission called Him back to the people who were difficult, smelly, slow to learn, but in need of help.

Jesus came down from the glory of heaven to the pain of a fallen world; from the top to the bottom of human suffering. He came down from fellowship with Moses and Elijah to a man feeling hopeless about a demon-possessed boy who could not speak and who rolled on the ground; from heavenly light to the disciples who had failed to meet the test of faith.

Read Mark 9:14-32. In the past, the disciples had gone out without Jesus and had been able to cast (throw) out demons (Mark 6:12, 13). But now they failed. What do we find in Mark 9:14-32 that shows why they failed?

The disciples had often seen Jesus casting out demons and healing the sick. They themselves had been able to do the same miracles when Jesus

sent them out two by two. But they had become careless. God's miracles had begun to become very common to the disciples.

"Their unbelief shut them out from deeper sympathy with Jesus. They became careless about the sacred (holy) work given to them. This caused them to fail in their work against the powers of darkness. . . . In order to succeed, they must come to the work in a different spirit. Their faith must be made stronger with prayer, fasting, and humble hearts. They must empty themselves of self-pride, and be filled with the Holy Spirit and power of God. Earnest prayer, full dependence on God, and faithfulness to His work can bring people the Holy Spirit's help in the battle against the rulers of darkness and wicked spirits in high places."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 430, 431.

In what ways has your spiritual life been a failure? What caused those failures? What do you need to change about your spiritual life? What principles⁴ did you learn from today's lesson that could help you make those changes?

MONDAY—MAY 9
TRUE GREATNESS (Mark 9:32-50).

Mark 9:32 teaches a wonderful lesson. It helps us understand the

⁴principles—laws upon which other laws are based. For example, the Ten Commandments are based on two principles: (1) love for God and (2) love for other people.

minds of the disciples. Jesus is giving them words of truths. But His words are not what they want to hear. So they do not try to learn more. How are we the same as the disciples?

What were the spiritual results of the disciples not wanting to hear what Jesus had to say? Mark 9:33, 34. How did their words show just how far they were from the true principles of Jesus' kingdom?

Now read Mark 9:35-50. The spiritual idea in Jesus' words is very important for anyone who claims to be a Christian. It is a theme that goes to the heart of the spiritual problem shown by the disciples' desire to be the greatest. What is that theme? Why is it so important? What other verses can you find in the Bible that discuss this theme?

There is a philosophy called egoism. It teaches that each person ought to (should) look after (first think about) his or her own interests. It also teaches that each person should ignore the interests of other people except when those interests are helpful to his or her own interests. People should look out only for themselves. That is an attitude which does not need to be taught, because it is already a part of our sinful nature.

⁵rabbis—Jewish religious teachers.

If there were no God or no final judgment, how could you defend egoism? Why is ethical egoism unacceptable to Christians?

TUESDAY—MAY 10

DIVORCE (Mark 10:1-12).

What point does Jesus make in Mark 10:1-12 about divorce? What message does He have for us today on divorce? Read also Matthew 19:1-10.

Probably no issue causes more debate among Seventh-day Adventists today than divorce and remarriage. The same was true in Jesus' time. The Jews had only the Old Testament. But they debated a lot over two verses: "Suppose a man gets married to a woman. But later he decides he doesn't [does not] like her. He finds something shameful [unclean] about her. So he gives her a letter of divorce and sends her away from his house. Then after she leaves his house she becomes another man's wife" (Deuteronomy 24:1, 2, NIV). There were two groups of rabbis⁵ during Jesus' time: (1) the followers of Hillel and (2) the followers of Shammai. These groups argued over the meaning of shamefulness (uncleanness). Some rabbis believed shamefulness could mean something as unimportant as burning a meal. Other rabbis had a much more strict interpretation. But Jesus makes it clear that there should

be no divorce except in the case of unfaithfulness (adultery).

Notice how Jesus moves away from Deuteronomy and goes back to Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 as His authority.⁶ What point was He making from those verses in Genesis? Also, what does that tell us about His opinion that Genesis is accurate and authoritative (correct and true)?

Mark tells us that the disciples asked Jesus to explain more clearly about His answer to the Pharisees⁷ (Mark 10:10). Jesus' view of marriage, adultery, and divorce did not agree with many of the ideas in Jewish society. The Jews put husbands and wives in unequal positions. But Jesus' words showed that men and women can both be guilty of adultery.

How can we as individuals, and as a church, expect members to follow the Bible teaching on marriage and divorce, while showing mercy⁸ toward those people who do not follow the Bible teaching?

WEDNESDAY—MAY 11

Mark tells us that Jesus was not very pleased with the disciples' attitude toward the little children.

The Greek word translated “angry” (NlrV) is a strong word suggesting disgust. Why do you think the disciples acted as they did toward the children? Mark 9:33, 34 and Matthew 15:23 will help you answer this question.

Our attitude toward children shows much about us. To communicate with children, we need to go outside ourselves. We have to listen and try to understand their world. People who are self-centered cannot get close to children. In the same way, people who are always hoping to profit in some material way from relationships with people will have little time for children. The fact that Jesus was so open to children says a lot about this Man whose life flowed out to bless everyone. The disciples' attitude toward the children shows how much they needed to grow.



⁶authority—basis for truth.

⁷Pharisees—religious leaders of Jesus' day who believed a person must keep God's law to be saved.

⁸mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

Jesus told the disciples, “What I’m [I am] about to tell you is true. Anyone who will not receive God’s kingdom like a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:15, NIV). What did He mean? How did Jesus’ words show a principle that the disciples needed to understand? Compare⁹ your answer with what others in the class have to say. Read also Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:13; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Peter 1:14; 1 John 5:21.



We need a childlike faith.

Children are innocent, open, trusting, and humble. The followers of our heavenly Father need to have these traits in their own lives. Innocent children are less likely than adults to judge or to show prejudice¹⁰ toward

other people. Children are helpless. They depend upon the mercy and love of people who can do for them what they cannot do for themselves. This is why Jesus told us we need to be like children.

Write a prayer asking God to give you a more childlike faith. What things are you asking for? What useful things can you do to get them?

THURSDAY—MAY 12

**ATTITUDES TOWARD RICHES
(Mark 10:17-31).**

We are in the final area of Jesus’ teaching for the disciples. We see Jesus trying to correct their wrong opinions about wealth. The disciples at first were “astonished [surprised]” at Jesus’ words. Then they were “greatly astonished” (Mark 10:24, 26, NKJV). They had accepted the Pharisees’¹⁰ belief that wealth and health were proof of God’s blessing. They thought that being poor and sick showed God’s displeasure. When the disciples saw a man who was born blind, they asked Jesus: “ ‘Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ” (John 9:1, 2, NIV).

Study the story of the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-22 (Matthew

⁹compare—show how things are the same.

¹⁰prejudice—judgment based on feelings without knowing facts; prejudged feelings against a certain group of people because of their color or strange beliefs.

19:16-22; Luke 18:18-23). Summarize what you think is the basic spiritual message in these verses.



The rich young ruler.

The rich young ruler had so much. He was young. He was energetic (he came running to Jesus). He was respectful (he knelt before Jesus). He already had an important position. He had great wealth. He was concerned about spiritual things. But what did he not have?

Is Jesus' test to the rich young ruler to be used by everyone who would be Jesus' disciple? Should everyone be expected to sell all their things and give to the poor? If not, why not? Compare Jesus' instructions to other rich people who came to Him, such as

Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9) and Nicodemus (John 3:1-21).

In many ways, the key verses to understand Mark 10 and the answer to the above question are Mark 10:23, 24. The problem is not wealth. The problem is how a person uses his or her wealth. Jesus knew the rich young ruler's weakness, because He knew the ruler's heart. When the rich young ruler turned away from Jesus, this proved that his wealth was an idol to him. If the ruler had the right attitude about wealth, Jesus would not have said to him what He did.

“ ‘How hard it is for those [people] who have riches to enter the kingdom of God’ ” (Mark 10:23, NKJV). What is wrong with trusting in riches? What other word could you replace riches with that would show the same principle? What point is Jesus teaching us? In your own life, what other word could you replace riches with?



What idols do I have?

FRIDAY—MAY 13

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “Ministry,”¹¹ “Who Is the Greatest?” “Blessing the Children,” and “ ‘One Thing Thou [You] Lackest,’ ”¹² in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 426–431, 432–442, 511–517, and 518–523.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As a class, discuss some of the things that cause even believers to doubt God, to question their faith, and to be afraid to trust in the Lord. Is it ever right to doubt God, question your faith, or to be afraid to trust God? How can you help people overcome their doubts, their fears, their lack of faith?
2. As a class, choose a few names of people the world judges as great or famous. Why does the world think these people are great? Now think of some people God Himself might judge as great. Why would God think these peo-

ple are great? Contrast¹³ the great people the world would choose with the great people God would choose. What lesson can we learn from this?

3. The week’s lesson talked about our attitude toward children. But what about our attitude toward poor or “unimportant” people who can do nothing to help us move up in the world? How might we treat them differently from someone who can do a lot for us? What does Jesus’ example say to us about how we should treat everyone? What do we need to do so we can treat people the way Jesus treated them?

SUMMARY: This week, we saw Jesus deal with the wrong attitudes and actions of His disciples. They often failed. But Jesus tried to correct their wrong thinking and actions with love and patience.

¹¹ministry—Jesus’ work to save and to help people.

¹²lackest—do not have.

¹³contrast—show how things are different.