

Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46, 47; John 14:6; Eph. 4:11–15; 2 Pet. 2:1–3; Rev. 14:6–12.*

Memory Text: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

Mission is not an old-fashioned word associated with tropical helmets and six-year terms in isolated places around the world. The term *mission* refers to a core aspect of the Christian life. “The words *mission* and *missionary* come from Latin words meaning send and one sent. . . . The English Bible usually uses the noun *apostle*, which also comes from the Greek word that means one sent. . . . Thirty-nine times the Gospel of John says that Jesus was sent by God. Thirty-nine times, then, Jesus is defined in that book alone as a missionary or apostle.”—Jon L. Dybdahl, “Missionary God—Missionary Church” in Erich W. Baumgartner, ed., *Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998), p. 8.

We, as followers of Christ, are fellow missionaries with Jesus. As He was sent to this world, so we are sent to represent Him and to preach the three angels’ messages to every person. The longer we are here, however, the greater the danger of our becoming inward-focused, seeking to maintain our structures and institutions at the expense of what we are called to do, which is to preach to the world the present-truth message that God has given us.

The Week at a Glance: Mission is the heart of the church. The destiny of people, far and near, is at stake. Mission is not one among many programs of the church. It is the very reason for its existence. Each Christian is called to be a missionary.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 27.

People Will Be Lost, Unless . . .

Theologians through the ages have debated whether or not God eventually will save all people. Some say God’s love guarantees that, eventually, no one will be lost. Others say that people who have never heard of Christ will get an opportunity to come to believe after death. Others again defend various alternative theories. The problem with theories, however, is that often they try to explain everything when, in fact, we must simply be content with what God has revealed to us. There are questions to which we do not know the answers. But we know that He is totally just in what He does and, at the same time, is limitless in His love. He also has made clear that people have a free will and that it is possible to be lost. In the end there will be a separation between those who are saved and those who will face eternal death. And we know also that the gospel must be preached as quickly as possible to as many people as possible.

What do the following texts tell us about the importance of preaching the gospel to the whole world?

- *John 14:6* _____
- *Acts 4:12* _____
- *1 John 5:11, 12* _____

John 3:16 is one of the best-known texts in the Bible. “ ‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ ” (*NIV*). The text speaks about the love of God, which found expression in the *sending* of His Son to this earth. It promises eternal life to all who believe in Him. But it also clearly points to the alternative. Those who do not listen to the gospel call and refuse to accept Christ will perish. The decision as to who will perish and who will receive eternal life is not ours. We may be in for some real surprises when we see the roll call of the saved. Without overriding people’s will, God will do everything possible to reduce the number of those who will perish. And—amazingly enough—He has, in His wisdom, given us a role in that process.

What is your own role in the church’s mission? How seriously do you take the call to reach others with the gospel? What more could you do?

The Great Commission

The command to take the gospel to the entire world is found in all four Gospels, as well as in the book of Acts. They show, of course, clear parallels, but there are also some significant differences. One needs to read all versions to form a complete picture of everything that is implied in the Great Commission.

Read the passages in which the Great Commission is recorded and note how they complement each other. What are the specific details in each of these passages?

Matt. 28:19, 20 _____

Mark 16:15, 16 _____

Luke 24:46, 47 _____

John 20:21 _____

Acts 1:8 _____

The gospel is to be preached “to all nations.” According to General Conference statistics, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is now proclaiming its message in more than two hundred countries. This means that there are only a few countries in which our church does not have an official presence. Among these are several large ones: North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen; most of the others are small, with less than one million inhabitants. So, one would be tempted to conclude that the Adventist Church almost has “finished the work.” That, however, would be false. For even though we must give thanks to our Lord that our church continues to grow rapidly in many parts of the world and that many new territories constantly are being entered, the challenge is still enormous. When the New Testament speaks about “nations,” it uses a word that would be more correctly translated as people groups or “ethnic groups.” Our work, therefore, is not completed until all people groups have been reached. There is considerable debate about how many such people groups exist. The number quoted by specialists varies between some twelve thousand to more than twenty thousand, depending on the definition one uses. But, whatever definition is used, several thousand of these people groups have not yet been reached.

Think about all the unreached people in your own community, whatever their ethnic background. What difference has your existence made in reaching them? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your role in the mission of the church?

A Witnessing Church

What special message is to be proclaimed by God’s people in the time of the end? *Rev. 14:6–12*. What is your understanding of that message? Paraphrase it in your own words.

The passage in which we find the messages of the three angels is found in a context that clearly focuses on the end of time. It is immediately preceded by a vision of the “firstfruits” (*vs. 4*) of the redeemed and followed by a vision of the “harvest” (*vs. 15*) of all the saved. It is important to know what these messages entail. But also we need to understand who these “angels” are that bring this “eternal gospel” (*vs. 5, NIV*). The fact that the word *angel* in prophecy is a symbol for human messengers, leaders, and church members is also underscored by Ellen G. White: “The angels are represented as flying in the midst of heaven, proclaiming to the world a message of warning, and having a direct bearing upon the people living in the last days of this earth’s history. No one hears the voice of these angels, for they are a symbol to represent the people of God who are working in harmony with the universe of heaven. Men and women, enlightened by the Spirit of God, and sanctified through the truth, proclaim the three messages in their order.”—*Life Sketches*, p. 429.

Just as in the Great Commission, we find in the opening statement of the three angels’ messages a strong emphasis on the challenge to take the gospel to every person on earth. Yet, a great danger that we face, especially the longer we are here, is shifting from the missionary mode to the maintenance mode. We can easily lose sight of our mission to witness to the world and focus more on protecting and sustaining our own institutions. When that happens to us, or the churches or institutions we represent, then we are losing the reason for our existence.

Think about this potential problem, that of focusing more on self-preservation than on mission. How does this happen? How can we recognize when it does, and what can we do to keep from falling into this trap?

Personal Witness

It is not so difficult to agree with the statement that the church must be mission-minded. But who is the church? The church is not primarily an organization; rather, it is individuals who are, without any exception, called to be witnesses.

Why should we be confident that we can be witnesses of our faith? *1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11–15.*

Not all of us have the gift of preaching or teaching. But we all have been gifted in some way so that we can be what we are called to be—disciples always prepared to talk about the hope that is ours (*1 Pet. 3:15*).

What is the ultimate resource for those who are willing to witness of their faith? *John 14:26; Acts 1:4, 8; 2:1–4.*

The fact that Christ has promised the presence of the Holy Spirit to His followers and that we can receive spiritual gifts does not mean that it is not necessary to make any preparations or to undergo any training. The apostles were disciples who for more than three years underwent the most intensive training possible. Likewise, disciples today must be intentional about receiving training for Christian witness, and the church must make it a priority to constantly prepare relevant training materials and opportunities to equip the members for their task. But training alone will prove insufficient. God’s people today need the presence and endowment of the Holy Spirit if they want to be successful in their outreach to others.

One simple truth, however, will always remain: You cannot give what you do not have. Unless we make sure that we have a living relationship with God, we cannot hope to lead others to that same experience.

What is a vital condition for all who want to be witnesses of their faith? *2 Pet. 3:18.*

A church that responds to its calling will be a growing church. But growth should not be limited to numerical growth. Individually and corporately we must be “growing in grace” if our witnessing truly is to be productive.

What’s your understanding of what it means to grow in grace? How can you tell if you are? What criteria do you use? Share your answers in class on Sabbath.

Sharing the Lord

There is no doubt that sharing the message of the crucified and risen Christ, who is now our Intercessor with His Father, also implies a faithful teaching of the important doctrinal truths that God has revealed in His Word.

How important is it to teach and adhere to sound doctrine? *Titus 2:1, 2 Pet. 2:1–3.*

If we want to believe in the God of the Bible and have decided to follow Christ, we will want to know as much as we can about Him, about His character, and about what He expects from us. We try to summarize what we learn in the Bible in a series of doctrines and teachings. To some people, doctrinal statements are no more than irrelevant mental baggage. That is a tragic misunderstanding. Without sound doctrines our faith soon will become unfocused and shallow. Rather than growing in our faith, we eventually will discover that our faith becomes less and less meaningful. Unsound doctrines often will point us away from Christ, to ourselves or to something else that supposedly can contribute to our salvation. When we fail to ground our faith in sound biblical teaching, we are in grave danger of straying from the center of our faith: Jesus Christ our Lord.

What is to be the centerpiece of all our preaching and witnessing? *1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2.*

The stress on the importance of sound doctrine must be complemented with the unconditional determination to anchor all we say in Jesus Christ. Everything we believe and state as doctrine must be related to the One in whom we are assured of our eternal salvation. If there is no connection with Jesus Christ, a doctrine will be no more than a piece of technical information, which may be interesting and intellectually challenging, but nothing more. But if rooted in Jesus Christ, a doctrine will help us better understand the plan of redemption and will enhance our relationship with our Lord.

Think about some of the false teachings that exist in the Christian world: eternal torment in hell, the predestination of some people to be saved and others to be lost, the belief that Jesus Christ was not divine but merely a great man. How could these and other false teachings negatively impact our understanding of God and the plan of salvation?

Further Study: For various aspects of the mission challenge for Seventh-day Adventists, individually and corporately, see Jon L. Dybdahl, ed., *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1999). See also Ellen G. White, “God’s Purpose for His Church,” in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 9–16.

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, talk over your answer to the final question on Wednesday. What are the different perspectives of what it means to grow in grace?
- ② Take a good look at your local church. Where is the main emphasis? Is it on the church itself and ministering to the needs of the congregation itself, or is it on mission and on witnessing? How do we strike the right balance; that is, how do we disciple those who have joined us, while at the same time not neglect the call to reach all people? Where does your church stand on this topic, and in what ways can you help the church improve where it needs to?
- ③ How do we as a church protect ourselves from many of the dangerous theological trends that constantly are seeking to infiltrate and pollute our teachings? At the same time, how do we remain open to growing and advancing in new light that can help us better understand our Lord and our mission?

Summary: The gospel of Jesus Christ must be preached in all the world. This is the responsibility of all who call themselves disciples. All of us have received certain relevant gifts, and all of us have the promise of the Spirit to further equip us. The preaching of the gospel should be based on sound doctrine, but everything we proclaim must be rooted in the One whom the gospel is all about.

Determined to Serve

by SETH A. LARYEA

Nyuma stopped shoveling gravel and straightened his back before he answered the question I'd just asked. "I work hard and press forward in spite of difficult circumstances, for I want to fulfill God's purpose in my life and serve Him." And Nyuma is doing that. In spite of financial hardships, he presses toward his goal of completing his education at Valley View University in Ghana.

This day Nyuma is working at the construction site of the new church on the university campus. The church, a recipient of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, will seat 2,500 worshipers and be the center of the university campus. Nyuma works to see the church finished as well as to make his personal dream of an education a reality.

Nyuma grew up in Sierra Leone. He and his friends walked 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) to school and back every day. When he completed primary school, his guardian sent him to work on the farm instead of continuing his studies. When his father learned that Nyuma was not studying, he took the boy to a secondary school in another part of the country.

There Nyuma learned about Seventh-day Adventists and eventually was baptized. His life took on a new direction, and he realized that God was calling him to become a pastor. He continued studying until his father retired. Then Nyuma had no money to continue his studies. He found work doing menial jobs to raise money to continue his studies and finally completed his secondary education when he was 21 years old.

Then the country was thrown into a bitter civil war in which thousands were maimed or murdered. "But God saved me to serve Him," Nyuma said. For the next six years he worked as a lay evangelist in Sierra Leone.

At last he made his way to Valley View University in Ghana to study theology. He completed two years of study before he was forced to leave classes to earn money to complete his education. But Nyuma does not waste time feeling sorry that he cannot study. He offered to work on the church construction team, which is hard work, for he is determined to move toward his calling to be a minister. "Through these difficulties," he says, "God is strengthening me for His service."

Nyuma's determination encourages others to achieve their goals too. He will make a good minister in his Master's service.

Your mission offerings support schools at all levels in nearly two hundred countries. And your Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings make possible projects such as the church at Valley View University. Thank you.

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This quarter, instead of studying John's Gospel (his own inspired eyewitness account of Jesus) or the book of Revelation (which he also wrote), we're going to study his three letters. Though addressed to certain churches and individuals in his time, they deal with issues relevant to us today, issues such as false doctrine, sin, love, apostasy, and obedience. But most important of all, they deal with Jesus Christ, the One through whom we were created ("How did we get here?"), the One who gives our existence meaning and purpose ("Why are we here?") and the One who promises to come again and raise us to eternal life ("Where are we going?"). In short, in Jesus we find the answers to the most important questions.

Lesson 1—Jesus and the Johannine Letters

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: From Whom and to Whom—Author and Recipients
(*1 John 1:1–3; 3 John 1, 13, 14*)

MONDAY: What—The Content of the Epistles (*2 John 1–13*)

TUESDAY: Why—The Purpose of Writing These Letters (*1 John 1:4, 2:12–14*)

WEDNESDAY: Jesus in the Johannine Epistles (*1 John 1:1, 2:1, 5:20*)

THURSDAY: Jesus' Ministry in John's Epistles (*1 John 1:7*)

Memory Text—*1 John 4:14*

Sabbath Gem: John's Epistles focus on problems in the early Christian church but also point to God the Father and the Son and portray who They are and what They have done for us. When we ponder these truths, we need to consider what our response must be.

Lesson 2—Experiencing the Word of Life

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Introduction to John's First Letter (*1 John 1:1–4*)

MONDAY: First John 1 and John 1 (*1 John 1:1–5, John 1:1–5*)

TUESDAY: The Word of Life (*1 John 1:1, 2*)

WEDNESDAY: Eyewitnesses (*1 John 1:1–4*)

THURSDAY: Fellowship of the Saints (*1 John 1:3*)

Memory Text—*1 John 1:3*

Sabbath Gem: Just as eyewitness accounts are taken seriously in a court of law, we should realize the power behind John's account, which is based on his personal experience with Jesus, and be willing to witness as to how Christ is working in our lives.

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