

LESSON 11 *June 5–11

Waging Love



SABBATH AFTERNOON

A Jewish cantor (worship leader) and his wife who lived in Lincoln, Nebraska, began receiving threatening and obscene phone calls. They discovered the calls came from a leader of an American hate group, the Ku Klux Klan. Knowing his identity, they could have turned him in to the police. But they decided on a more radical approach. When they learned that he was crippled, they showed up at his door with dinner! He was utterly flabbergasted. His hatred melted before their love. The couple kept visiting him, and the friendship grew. He even thought of becoming Jewish!

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry . . . ?” (*Isa. 58:6, 7, NRSV*). Ironically, the couple in Lincoln kept such a fast by sharing their feast with a hungry oppressor, thereby setting him free from his own bonds of unjust prejudice! Let’s learn more about this important spiritual principle as depicted by the prophet Isaiah.

The Week at a Glance: What did salvation cost? Why was the Lord unhappy with His people’s worship? How does the Lord expect us to treat the poor and needy among us? What is true religion all about? What are the blessings that come to those who give of themselves for others?

Memory Text: “If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday” (*Isaiah 58:10, NRSV*).

**Study this lesson to prepare Sabbath, June 12.*

SUNDAY June 6

Buy Something Free? *(Isa. 55:1-7)*

Read this text: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!” *(Isa. 55:1, NRSV)*. What contradiction do you see there?

Suppose you took food and stood on the street in a big city and announced to the hungry and homeless there: “Yo, you who have no money, come, buy and eat!” But how can they buy if they have no money?

However, if you add the words, as Isaiah did: “without money and without price” (*vs. 1, NRSV*), the point becomes clearer. Isaiah appeals to people to accept forgiveness (*vs. 7*) freely. Yet, the word *buy* emphasizes that what God offers people to meet their needs and desires is valuable, so receiving it requires a transaction (transfer of something of worth). God freely offers forgiveness within the framework of a restored covenant relation with His people, but not because it was free for Him: He bought it at the terrible, blood-drenched price of His own Servant. Though free, it came with a terrible cost to Himself.

What was the price for our salvation? *See 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.*

How does Isaiah’s approach to salvation compare with that of the New Testament? *Eph. 2:8, 9.*

Isaiah encapsulates the gospel in the Old Testament, which is the same as the gospel in the New Testament. There was no “old-covenant” salvation by works, to be superseded by “new-covenant” salvation by grace. Ever since God’s promise of a Deliverer to Adam and Eve (*Gen. 3:15*), there has been only one way to salvation: by grace through faith (*Eph. 2:8*); “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 6:23, NRSV*). From the ancient Gilgamesh, who did heroic exploits in a vain search for eternal life, to modern actors who believe in reincarnation, people have tried all different routes to salvation, but all are fruitless. This is why they need to know about Jesus and what He has accomplished for them at the Cross.

Salvation is free, in that there’s nothing we can do to earn it. Our works can never be good enough to save us. Yet, at the same time, it can cost us everything. What does that mean? See, for instance, Matt. 10:39, Luke 9:23, 14:26, Phil. 3:8.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Isaiah 55, 58.*

Teachers Aim:

1. To explore the cost of salvation.
2. To contrast nominal with true religion.

Lesson Outline:

I. Come and “Buy.”

- A. The invitation to “buy” (*compare Rev. 3:18*) reminds us that salvation is obtained by those who give themselves to Christ as His purchased possessions.
- B. God Himself is the only One who could pay the price for sin. Fortunately for us, then, it was He who bought our salvation.

II. The Cost of Discipleship.

- A. While we never can buy our own salvation, upon receiving His Spirit at our conversion, our proper response is to take up the cross of discipleship.
- B. Isaiah 58 contrasts nominal religion—outward shows of piety—with the true response of faith, which is caring for others and reverencing God.

Summary: Anything short of the true worship God calls us to is idolatry. In response to His gift of salvation, God expects us to give freely of ourselves, both in service to others and in reverence to Him. These are not acts of obligation but heartfelt responses to a God who invites us to share a covenant relationship with Him.

COMMENTARY

Introduction: Waging Love.

The hallmarks of true religion are consistent, selfless, compassionate care for others (*see James 1:27, 1 John 3:16-18*). “All around us are heard the wails of a world’s sorrow. On every hand are the needy and distressed. It is ours to aid in relieving and softening life’s hardships and misery.

“Practical work will have far more effect than mere sermonizing. We are to give food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and shelter to the homeless. And we are called to do more than this. The wants of the soul, only the love of Christ can satisfy. If Christ is abiding in us, our hearts will be full of divine sympathy. The sealed fountains of earnest, Christlike love will be unsealed.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 417.

I. Without Money and Without Price, Though Infinitely Precious. (*Isa. 1:18, 19; 55:1-7*).

“Salvation is a free gift, and yet it is to be bought and sold. In

MONDAY June 7

High Thoughts and Ways *(Isa. 55:6-13)*

Why does God say His thoughts and ways are higher than ours, “as the heavens are higher than the earth” (*vss. 8, 9, NRSV*)? **What do you think that means?**

There’s no question that the God who created a universe in which even some of the simplest things contain mysteries that our minds cannot begin to fathom is a God whose ways are beyond what we can ever begin to fully grasp. This knowledge of His infinite superiority should, therefore, make it easier for us to humbly receive His help. *See Isa. 57:15.*

Read Isaiah 55:6-9. **What is the context in which the Lord talks about how His ways and thoughts are higher than what we can imagine? What is He saying He does that is so hard for us to grasp?**

Of all the great mysteries of the universe, no doubt the greatest one of all is the plan of salvation, a mystery we can barely begin to understand. (*See Eph. 6:19.*) That the Creator of the universe would stoop to clothe Himself in humanity, live a life of toil and suffering, only to die then in our behalf, a sacrifice for sin, all in order that He could pardon us and show mercy to us is a truth that will, for all the ages of eternity, thrill the hearts of God’s created beings.

“The theme of redemption is one that angels desire to look into; it will be the science and the song of the redeemed throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. Is it not worthy of careful thought and study now? . . .

“The subject is inexhaustible. The study of the incarnation of Christ, His atoning sacrifice, and mediatorial work will employ the mind of the diligent student as long as time shall last; and looking to heaven with its unnumbered years, he will exclaim, ‘Great is the mystery of godliness.—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 360.

Look at the bad things you have done: the people whom you have hurt, the unkind words you have spoken, the ways in which you have disappointed others, not to mention yourself. And yet, through Jesus, you can be forgiven all these things and stand, right now, perfect and righteous in the sight of God. If that isn’t a mystery, what is?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

the market of which divine mercy has the management, the precious pearl is represented as being bought without money and without price. In this market all may obtain the goods of heaven. . . .

“The gospel of Christ is a blessing that all may possess. The poorest are as well able as the richest to purchase salvation; for no amount of worldly wealth can secure it. It is obtained by willing obedience, by giving ourselves to Christ as His own purchased possession.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 116, 117.

God’s salvation is free not because it is valueless to us or of little cost to Him. He purchased our redemption and access to the gospel at infinite sacrifice and suffering. If the eyes of our heart are open to this revelation, we shall see more and more of the value of salvation and the privileges that are ours through the sacrifice of Christ (*see Rom. 8:32, 2 Cor. 8:9, Eph. 1:17-20*). We also will have the power through the Holy Spirit to refrain from any indulgence, activity, or expenditure that would detract from our calling or hinder the advancement of the gospel.

II. Infinite Wisdom and Glory (*Isa. 55:6-13, Rom. 11:33-36*).

God’s wisdom is infinite in every field of knowledge, but what He most desires to reveal to us is a saving knowledge of His character and truth (*see Pss. 36:5-10; 40:5-10; 139:17, 18; Col. 2:1-8*). God has decreed that the words that go forth from His mouth shall accomplish His will. Those who accept His words will be guided into all truth and work in harmony with God’s will (*John 15:7-16, 16:13, 1 Thess. 2:13*). God’s Word is the great remedy for sin, ignorance, and spiritual indifference. That is why the psalmist so often refers to the “quickening,” or life-giving influence, of God’s Word (*see Pss. 119:25, 37, 40, 50, 88, 93, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159*). By nourishing our hearts and minds with His Word, we bring forth fruit for God’s glory through the power of the Holy Spirit (*see Rom. 6:17-22, 1 Pet. 1:22-25*). We no longer produce thorns that wound others, but healing balm instead (*see Isa. 55:13; compare Rom. 6:20-22, Heb. 6:8*).

III. Vital Religion.

Isaiah 58 is a call to repentance, revival, and reformation. God is describing a religious experience full of practical benefits and joy for everyone concerned. He condemns a somber piety that is full of malice, jealousy, and self-exaltation. Hypocrisy is both sickening and deadly. The fast that He approves is not the Pharisaic show of moral superiority (*see Luke 18:11, 12*) but a heartfelt interest in the well-being of others. True charity does not make a parade of benevolence or sacrifice. Its purpose is not to find favor with God or other people. It is simply the fruit of God’s love in the heart, the outflow of His grace operating within the depths of our being.

TUESDAY June 8

Fast Friends *(Isa. 58:1-8)*

What is the “fast” referred to in verse 3?

This must be the fast of the Day of Atonement, the only fast commanded by God (*Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27-32*). This is confirmed in Isaiah 58:3 by the parallel expression “humble ourselves” (*NRSV*), which follows the terminology of Leviticus. Humbling oneself referred to various forms of self-denial, including fasting (*compare Ps. 35:13; Dan. 10:2, 3, 12*).

The Day of Atonement setting explains God’s command to “Lift up your voice like a trumpet!” (*Isa. 58:1, NRSV*). This kind of ram’s horn trumpet, called a shofar, was to be blown as a memorial or reminder ten days before the Day of Atonement (*Lev. 23:24*). Furthermore, every fiftieth year, on the Day of Atonement, it was to announce the beginning of the Jubilee year of freedom (*Lev. 25:9, 10; compare Isa. 27:13*).

Read Isaiah 58:3-7. What is the Lord complaining to them about? What was wrong with their “fast”?

It seems the people were expecting the Lord to congratulate them for their “piety.” Of course, they had it all backwards. Practicing self-denial on the Day of Atonement was to express their gratitude and loyalty to Him on the day the high priest went before God to cleanse the sanctuary and thereby cleanse them from sins for which they had already been forgiven (*Leviticus 16; compare chapter 4*). Their acts should have been done in thankfulness and gratitude to the God who saved them in the day of judgment, not in order to get God’s approval for their “piety” and “devotion.” After all, it was the sins of the people that had defiled God’s sanctuary. It had to be cleansed with blood that was shed because of what they had done.

One of the crucial lessons that comes from these texts regards the difference between being religious and truly being a follower of Christ. How do we see the difference there? How do we, as individuals, face the same danger as those presented here, which is believing that our religious rituals somehow show we are really following the Lord as He asks us to?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

IV. True Compassion (*Isa. 58:7-11*).

Real love does not oppress its recipients or make demands but seeks to lighten cares and liberate from anxieties. Truly loving people unselfishly share their time, means, and hospitality in a spirit of affectionate regard. They are compassionate toward others in their sufferings, struggles, and defeats. Those who sincerely practice such love glow with vitality and a sense of intimacy with God that is alien to self-centered people. God's servants have the water of eternal life springing perpetually from within (*see Ps. 87:7, Isa. 58:11, John 4:14, 7:37-39*).

V. His Rest Is Glorious.

Those who serve God based on the terms described in Isaiah 58:6-11 have truly entered into His spiritual rest and are well able

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Hosea 6:6, Psalm 51:17, Romans 12:1, Hebrews 13:16.*

- ① In *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, Ellen White states that God “is to be glorified, His authority respected. . . . God reserved the seventh day as a period of rest for man, for the good of man as well as for His own glory.”—Page 532. Discuss how the Sabbath reveals God's love toward us. How does our observance of the Sabbath reveal our love toward Him? Discuss the nature of true Sabbath keeping.
- ② We must be careful to balance faith and works as expressions of our love for, and loyalty to, God. What does God say about making sacrifices to/for Him? What does He require and accept from us? *Ps. 51:17, Hos. 6:6, Rom. 12:1, Heb. 13:16*. Based on these texts, what changes must we make in our individual lives? In the denomination and our congregation?
- ③ What can we learn from the following quote as it relates to Matthew 11:29 and the example Christ gave while on earth? “Human nature is ever struggling for expression, ready for contest; but he who learns of Christ is emptied of self, of pride, of love of supremacy, and there is silence in the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 15.
- ④ What place does the Sabbath have in the plan of salvation? How do the plan of salvation and the Sabbath speak to God's character and His love for us? In your answer, consider the purpose of each and how each helps us to prepare for Christ's return.

WEDNESDAY June 9

Fast Fight *(Isa. 58:1-12).*

Ten days after trumpet blasts have reminded God's people that the Lord is acclaimed as their King and, on the very Day of Atonement when their humility through self-denial is to affirm their loyalty to Him as King, the prophet lifts up his voice like a trumpet to declare that they are rebelling against Him (*Isa. 58:1*).

Read through Isaiah 58:6-12. What are acts that God considers true acts of self-denial? After all, what's harder—to skip a few meals or to use your own time and money to feed the homeless in your town? What is the principle to be seen behind these acts? How do these acts compose true religion?

Anyone can be religious; anyone can go through religious rituals, even the right rituals, at the right time, with all the right formulas. But that alone is not what the Lord wants. Look at the life of Jesus. However faithful He was to the religious rituals of His time, the gospel writers focused so much more on His acts of mercy, healing, feeding, and forgiveness to those in need than on His faithfulness to ritual.

The Lord seeks a church, a people, who will preach truth to the world. But what is going to better attract people to the truth as it is in Jesus: strict adherence to dietary laws or a willingness to help the hungry? Strict rest on the Sabbath or a willingness to spend your own time and energy helping those who are in need?

Read Matthew 25:40 and James 1:27. What do they tell us?

Look at the blessings in Isaiah 58 that God says will come to those who seek to minister to the less fortunate. What do you think the Lord is saying to us here? Are these promises of supernatural intervention for our lives if we do these things? Or, perhaps, is He telling us of the natural blessing we receive by giving of ourselves to others as opposed to being selfish, greedy, and self-absorbed? Explain your answer.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

to appreciate God's sacred gift of time, the Sabbath. To them, observing this holy time is no more legalistic than keeping a date with a favorite person. People with this type of Sabbath experience are repairers of the breach. Their lives are not a barren trail through a dry wilderness. They are a causeway paved with love that leads to Paradise, but never by way of a detour from meeting human needs (see Ps. 25:10, Prov. 3:17, Phil. 3:14-16, 1 Cor. 11:1).

Witnessing

Review Isaiah 55:6-13 with your class.

Our fascination with the heavens has prompted Hollywood to develop such films as *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and *Planet of the Apes*. Through the imaginations of scriptwriters and movie directors, worlds have been created that go far beyond our imaginations.

But no Hollywood creation ever could compare with what this world would be like if we followed God's thoughts and ways. Isaiah 58 describes what our world is like when we do not follow God's thoughts and ways (vss. 1-5) and when we do (vss. 6-14). Review the characteristics of the world when we do not follow God's ways and when we do.

Regarding Isaiah 58, Ellen G. White wrote, "All around us are afflicted souls. Let us search out these suffering ones, and speak a word in season to comfort their hearts. Here and there—everywhere—we shall find them. Let us ever be channels through which may flow to them the refreshing waters of compassion. To those who minister to the necessities of the hungry and afflicted, the promise is, 'Then shall thy light rise in obscurity.'"—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1151.

As you go about your daily life this week, imagine the world as Isaiah describes it in Isaiah 58:6-14. Make use of the opportunities God will send your way to make that world a reality. Such a world is perhaps the best witness to the difference God can make in a person's life.

THURSDAY June 10

A Time for Us (*Isa. 58:13, 14*).

Why does Isaiah discuss the Sabbath in Isaiah 58:13, 14? What connection does this have with the Day of Atonement setting of the earlier verses?

The yearly Day of Atonement was a Sabbath day. This special ceremonial Sabbath was like the weekly Sabbath in that all work of any kind was prohibited (*Lev. 23:27-32*). Therefore, as recognized by early Seventh-day Adventists, the rule that the Day of Atonement period of rest lasted from evening to evening (*Lev. 23:32*) informs us that the same must be true of the weekly Sabbath. Similarly, although the primary context of Isaiah 58:13, 14 is the ceremonial Day of Atonement Sabbath, its message also applies to the weekly Sabbath.

Read Isaiah 58:13. What kind of day is the Sabbath supposed to be? How can we make our Sabbath experience like the one depicted here? Also, when you think about what the Sabbath represents, why should it be the kind of day described in this text?

Isaiah 58 deals with three main themes: self-denial, social kindness, and the Sabbath.

What are the connections between them?

First, all three involve concentration upon God, His priorities, and recognition of dependence upon Him. Second, by doing all three, humans pursue holiness by emulating God (*see Lev. 19:2*), who, in the form of Christ, humbled Himself (*Phil. 2:8*), who demonstrates self-sacrificing kindness (*John 3:16*), and who ceased from labor on the Sabbath at the end of the Creation week (*Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 20:11*).

Look at these other ties between the themes of self-denial, social kindness, and the Sabbath, as depicted in Isaiah 58: Sabbath freedom from weekly toil is kind to people because it lets them be refreshed (*Exod. 23:12, Mark 2:27*); Jesus showed that kind acts are appropriate on the Sabbath (*Mark 3:1-5, John 5:1-17*); true Sabbath keeping brings joy (*Isa. 58:14*), as does helping others (*vss. 10, 11*). What must change in your own life in order to experience these blessings yourself?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: At Christmas, it is traditional in many countries to exchange gifts. The size of the gift is immaterial—what matters is the joy it brings to both giver and receiver. Although the gift is free to the receiver, it cost the giver a price. So, in reality, the gift carries a price tag. Our lesson this week reminds us that Jesus paid a heavy price for our gift of salvation. “His blood atones for our sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 372.

Thought Questions:

❶ Discuss the differences between practicing Christianity and claiming to be a Christian. Review the following chart in order to put into perspective Christ’s instructions on caring for His flock.

Perceived Self-Denial	Real Self-Denial
Visiting those in prison	Working toward removing the chains of injustice
Serving a holiday lunch	Volunteering year-round in a shelter
Denouncing oppression	Working toward letting the oppressed go free
Giving a small donation	Paying someone’s mortgage after he/she was laid off

❷ Our church publishes a number of manuals that are meant to standardize certain religious functions, practices, and activities within the denomination. While these are helpful in many circumstances, how might they at times limit how, when, and where we minister to others?

Application Question:

The Sabbath provides a time-out from daily stresses, so we can focus completely on God. With that thought in mind, how might we use the Sabbath to introduce the Adventist faith to non-believers? Discuss ways we can involve them in practicing with us the joys of the Sabbath while, at the same time, honoring its sanctity.

Further Study: “No one can practice real benevolence without self-denial. Only by a life of simplicity, self-denial, and close economy is it possible for us to accomplish the work appointed us as Christ’s representatives. Pride and worldly ambition must be put out of our hearts. In all our work the principle of unselfishness revealed in Christ’s life is to be carried out. Upon the walls of our homes, the pictures, the furnishings, we are to read, ‘Bring the poor that are cast out to thy house.’ On our wardrobes we are to see written, as with the finger of God, ‘Clothe the naked.’ In the dining room, on the table laden with abundant food, we should see traced, ‘Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry?’ Isaiah 58:7.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 206.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Look at the question Isaiah asked the people of his time: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (*Isa. 55:2, NRSV*). Ask yourself, in what ways, if any, are we doing the same thing, laboring for that which does not satisfy? Why is it so easy to get caught up in that very trap?
- 2** If self-denial, social kindness, and the Sabbath were important on the day of atonement in Isaiah’s day, are they just as important in the end-time Day of Atonement (*Dan. 8:14*), during which God’s Jubilee trumpet will signal ultimate freedom at the second coming of Christ (*1 Cor. 15:52; compare Lev. 25:9, 10*)? Explain your answer.
- 3** Open up a discussion on the question of Sabbath keeping. What do you think Isaiah means when he says we should turn away from doing our own pleasure on the Sabbath, and yet at the same time call it a “delight” (*Isa. 58:13*)? How can we do both? Keep in mind the context of the complete text of Isaiah 58.

Summary: In Isaiah 55 and 58, the prophet appeals to his people to give up their thoughts and ways and return to God, whose ideal for their happiness is so much higher than their own. God mercifully pardons and then insists that the pardoned be merciful, in harmony with the spirit of the Day of Atonement and the Sabbath, because the gift of God’s forgiveness transforms the heart if it is truly received.