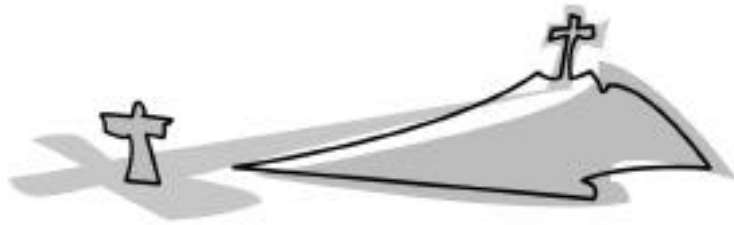


# In *the* Shadow of Calvary



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:28-36; 24:7; Acts 10:38, 39; 1 Cor. 15:13-18.*

**Memory Text:** “John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” (*John 1:29, NKJV*).

In *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, a monk heard about a bridge that collapsed and killed five people. He determined to find out why those particular five were killed. Because He believed in an all-powerful God, there had to be a rational explanation. Unfortunately, he took his notes, acquired over years of inquiry, and cast them into the sea. What he found disturbed him immensely—he couldn't find a good reason for their deaths.

Someone might have told Brother Juniper that he would not find *rational* answers. This side of heaven we don't have them. What we have is the Cross—God suffering for the sin, evil, and hurt of this world. Here we find, if not answers to questions about suffering, hope that those answers exist and one day will be revealed.

**The Week at a Glance:** What was John the Baptist's role in the ministry of Jesus? Why should the Cross be the center of our beliefs? Why did the disciples respond as they did to Christ's warning about the Cross? How do we reflect the same attitude?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 29.*

## John the Baptist—Christ’s Forerunner

(*John 1:29-34*).

Though little is given in Scripture about John the Baptist, enough is given to show us his zeal, dedication, faith, and (most important) humanity. We have much to learn from this fiery, uncompromising preacher who heralded the first coming of Christ.

**What** foundational truth did God reveal to John about Jesus of Nazareth and what Jesus came to do? What do you think John meant by those words (*John 1:29*)?

Although John certainly did not fully grasp the import of his own words designating Jesus as the Lamb of God, he, nonetheless, spoke them under the prompting of the Spirit. His mission was to open the minds and hearts of people to the centrality of Christ’s atoning sacrifice in the plan of salvation. Whatever else Jesus came to do—the healing, the teaching, the preaching, the raising from the dead—it all was to point the people not only to who He was but to what He was going to do for them by His death. Because without that death and what it would accomplish for the world, in the end all His other work would have been in vain.

**Look** up the following texts. What do they tell us about how crucial the death of Jesus was to the plan of salvation? *Mark 8:31, Luke 24:7, 1 Cor. 15:13-18.*

“The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary, and in connection with the wondrous, central truth of the Saviour’s atonement. Those who study the Redeemer’s wonderful sacrifice grow in grace and knowledge.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 221.

**Why must the Cross and Christ’s atonement at the Cross be central to our message as Seventh-day Adventists? What can we do as a church to make sure that we keep this great truth at the center? What will happen to us if we ever lose this focus?**

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## **Christ's Life of Service, Suffering, and Sacrifice** (*Acts 10:38, 39*).

For about three and a half years, the Son of God toiled laboriously among fallen humanity. The Gospels are filled with account after account of the good deeds that Jesus accomplished through the power of God working through His humanity. Never did the world see such a Healer, such a Teacher, such a Lover of people! His life, from His earliest days, was dedicated to the service of fellow human beings.

**Describe** Christ's work and its effect. *Matt. 4:23-25; 8:14-17; Acts 10:38, 39.*

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If you read Acts 10:38, 39, you can see the most incredible paradox: Jesus goes around "doing good," and what does He get for His effort but "hanged on a tree"? How could this happen? Why would someone, whose kindness, goodness, purity, and love were apparent to everyone, elicit such a negative, hateful reaction? Unless, of course, it was precisely His purity, love, and goodness that caused such a reaction.

**Read** John 3:19-21, 15:17-25, and Romans 8:7. How do they help answer the questions posed in the above paragraph?

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Lest we be so quick to judge and condemn, we ought to look at our own wicked hearts (*Jer. 17:9*). Who among us, when confronted by someone whose lifestyle or kindness or love or faith or generosity or benevolence are contrasted to our weaknesses in any (or all) of these areas, has not felt twinges of guilt, resentment, even hatred? And if we would feel this way when contrasted with another sinner, imagine what we might feel when placed in the company of Jesus.

**Why do we sometimes feel anger, resentment, or guilt when placed around such people? What should those thoughts tell us about ourselves? What kind of warning signals are they? What's the only remedy?**

## Warnings of the Cross

**At what point in His ministry did Christ begin to make increasing references to His destined crucifixion? Why do you think He waited until this time?** *Matt. 16:13-21, Luke 9:18-22.*

Many Bible scholars believe that it was in the summer before His crucifixion (August or September, A.D. 30) that Christ received Peter's great confession of His Messiahship at Caesarea-Philippi. (*See The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 231.) From that point on, Jesus wished to dispel the apostles' false concepts of His essential mission and brace them for His rapidly approaching ordeal and the attendant trials that they would bear for His sake.

**Why was it so difficult for the disciples to accept or even understand Christ's explicit references to His impending sacrifice?** *Mark 9:31, 32; Luke 9:44, 45.*

In both accounts, Mark and Luke say that the disciples feared to ask Jesus what He meant; that is, they didn't want to know. How human a character trait: not wanting to hear bad news, not wanting to hear something that would go against our own cherished notions and hopes.

In many ways, we can find the key to this attitude in Mark's account, a few verses later (*vss. 33, 34*), when they had been disputing among themselves who would be the greatest. In other words, those who were busy thinking about worldly honors weren't really ready for the shame and degradation of the Cross. No wonder Mark twice refers to the dullness of the disciples' comprehension of Christ's words and deeds, because their "hearts were hardened" (*Mark 6:52, NRSV; 8:17*). This hardening was from the deceitfulness of pride and vainglory that conflicted with the spirit of the Cross. His disciples, at this stage, viewed self-sacrificing love as a rare medallion to adorn the mantle of life's majestic moments, rather than as the proper spirit of everyday life. When they saw Christ turn aside in self-abnegation from opportunities to seize the reins of political power, they were offended by His apparent lack of gritty pragmatism and ambition.

**How, even in our local church or even in our own heart, do we see this same spirit manifested? It's only natural to want honor and glory, is it not? In what ways do you see it in yourself? Why, then, must we be broken at the foot of the cross?**

## Falling Shadows and Radiant Glory

**Read** Matthew 17:1-9, Luke 9:28-36. Write down what things happened that should have increased the faith of those who witnessed this incredible divine manifestation.

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Christ knew that His disciples were altogether unprepared for the impending crisis. Burdened with the mounting opposition of the religious leaders, with John the Baptist's recent beheading, and with Christ's warning of His own imminent sufferings, they faced a certain foreboding. Hence, this incredible manifestation of divine power, including a voice from heaven affirming Jesus before the disciples. All this certainly should have increased their faith and strengthened them for the coming trials.

**What** did Moses and Elijah talk about with Christ? *Luke 9:30, 31.* Why do you think they discussed this topic?

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It is fascinating that Heaven did not send mighty angels to the Savior at this time; instead, two human beings who themselves, in their own way, suffered the toils and trials of humanity came to talk with the Savior about His impending sacrifice on the cross. In other words, this incredible scene wasn't just for these three disciples (who slept through part of the whole thing, anyway) but for Jesus, to strengthen Him in His humanity as He faced the Cross. "These men, chosen above every angel around the throne, had come to commune with Jesus concerning the scenes of His suffering, and to comfort Him with the assurance of the sympathy of heaven."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 425.

**Imagine yourself having the privilege of some incredible divine manifestation of heavenly power that strongly affirmed your faith in Jesus, just as what Peter, James, and John had here. You would never doubt again, right? Your faith would remain solid, right? You'd never need any other affirmation, right? Why was this not the experience of the disciples, even after the Transfiguration? What was their problem, and what is ours?**

## Law of the New Kingdom *(Matt. 20:25-28)*.

Christ's ministry was moving toward its climax. He was leading His disciples on their last journey together. On the way, He told them plainly that at Jerusalem "all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished," for "the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again" (*Luke 18:31, NKJV; Matt. 20:18, 19, NKJV*). This statement of coming events should have turned the disciples' interest to the teachings of the prophets concerning these matters. But "they understood none of these things; . . . and they did not know the things which were spoken" (*Luke 18:34, NKJV*), not because Jesus' words were unclear or enigmatic but because His purposes were so foreign to their aims and expectations. They simply didn't want to hear what He had to say. Christ had, after all, commissioned them to proclaim everywhere that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (*Matt. 3:2, NKJV*) and promised that they would be given positions of high honor in it, enthroned as judges of Israel (*Matt. 19:27-30*).

**Stimulated** by this promise, James and John, with their mother, Salome, asked Jesus for what special favor? What did His reply reveal about the path to the throne of glory in His kingdom and the nature of His government? *Matt. 20:20-28, Mark 10:35-45*.

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This request smacked heavily of self-serving ambition, but Jesus did not rebuke them or their mother for coveting personal honors that were so incongruous with His character and mission. Rather, He sought to deepen and purify their love for Him and their attachment to His cause. He wished them to see that the cross precedes the crown.

**Fyodor Dostoyevski once wrote a story about Jesus coming to earth in the flesh, as He had come the first time. Before long, Jesus was arrested and thrown into jail, where He faced interrogation by the Grand Inquisitor, who wanted to know why Jesus came back and interfered with them and their plans. Now suppose Jesus were, in the flesh, to step directly into your life. In what ways would He be interfering with you and your plans? What does your answer tell you about yourself and how you are living?**

**Further Study:** See Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 359, 541–543; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 547–551, 644; *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 142; *The Sanctified Life*, pp. 56, 57; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 226.

“The cross of Calvary is to be lifted high above the people, absorbing their minds and concentrating their thoughts. Then all the spiritual faculties will be charged with divine power direct from God. Then there will be a concentration of the energies in genuine work for the Master. The workers will send forth to the world beams of light, as living agencies to enlighten the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 44.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Christ, the world’s best Teacher and Model of truth, consistently demonstrated, in every act, that He came “not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (*Mark 10:45*). Why did His disciples have such difficulty grasping His sacrificial, self-transcending mission and calling for their lives? What does this say about humanity in its fallen state? How only can this spirit be changed?
- 2 If Christ had grumbled about humanity’s lack of appreciation for His services and complained about His disciples’ unperceptiveness with regard to His essential aims and character, how would that have affected His influence and mission? Do we have any more right to grumble and complain than Christ had? What is the antidote to this all-too-common spirit and behavior? *John 15:11, 16:33, Heb. 12:1-5*.
- 3 The disciples, followers of Christ, were unprepared for the Cross, despite being given much light beforehand about it. What parallels can you find between them and their spiritual state and ours as a people and a church as we await the Second Coming?
- 4 Discuss the question at the end of Thursday’s section, though in the context of the church, as a whole, or in your local church setting. Would we welcome Jesus, or would He get in the way of our plans as a church?

## God Is Faithful

by Dobrinka Nakova

Evgeny Nakov grew up in an Adventist home in Bulgaria. But after serving in the army, he was not satisfied to live in the village; he wanted to see more of the world and earn good money.

Evgeny found work driving a taxi in Sofia, the capital city. Some days he earned good money, but other days he barely made enough to buy fuel. He tried working longer hours, but he became tired and had an accident that cost him his savings. At times he wondered if his failure to get ahead financially was due to his lack of faithfulness to God.

He helped his family sell a house, but on the way to the bank, robbers stole the money. The money wasn't even his; how would he ever repay it? *Why are so many bad things happening to me?* he wondered.

Evgeny began examining his spiritual values. He realized he hardly knew God and promised himself to spend more time getting to know Him.

One night he drove until 3:00 A.M. looking for customers, but with no luck. Finally two men stopped him for a ride. He took them far outside the city. But when they arrived, the men said they had no money. Evgeny feared pushing them to pay him. Feeling like a failure, he turned around and started toward home. *Why are things going so badly?* he wondered. *I've earned nothing today!*

As he drove home, the car lights shone on some papers lying on the road. He stopped the car to investigate. He found money. Lots of money. He found no bag or wallet from which it could have fallen. He picked up the money and counted it: \$250, three months' wages.

Evgeny knew that God had led him to the money, that God knows his needs and wants to be part of his life. Evgeny recommitted his life to God and asked God to lead him.

Soon Evgeny was offered an opportunity to study at an Adventist school outside Bulgaria. He had focused his life on making money, but God is refocusing his life on service. The peace that Evgeny feels assures him that he is on the right track.



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