

Jesus' Tender Love for People



SABBATH—MAY 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 5:44–48; Matthew 19:13, 14; Matthew 23:37; Luke 10:38–42; John 8:2–11; Acts 6:7.

MEMORY VERSE: “When He [Jesus] saw the crowds, He felt deep concern for them. They were beaten down and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36, NIV).

MATTHEW 9:35 TELLS HOW JESUS WENT through many areas of Palestine. He was “preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (NIV). In our doubting world today, people suspect that every effort to help them comes from some hidden reason. But the reason behind Jesus’ ministry (work) comes as a breath of fresh air: true love, described as “compassion (mercy)” (verse 36). Jesus was moved by the people. His heart went out to them. We see this same general concern in Mark 8:1–3. Jesus is concerned about the people fainting on their way home. He reminds His disciples (followers) “‘They have . . . been with Me three days.’” “‘They don’t [do not] have anything to eat. If I send them away hungry, they will become too weak on their way home. Some of them have come from far away’” (verses 2, 3, NIV).

What tender concern! It says a lot about Jesus. He knew His people. He understood their needs. He felt their pain. But He does not ask us to be exactly what He was or do exactly what He did. Jesus had Himself gone through 40 days of fasting. But He was concerned about the health and safety of folks who had experienced just three days with little or no food.

This week we will look at Jesus’ compassion for others.

SUNDAY—MAY 25**FOR THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY¹ (John 8:2–11)**

Review the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:2–11. Ellen G. White made it clear that the woman was set up (*The Desire of Ages*, page 461). But she was still partly guilty. How did Jesus treat her? What can we learn from this story?

“Jesus pardoned this woman and encouraged her to live a better life. In doing this, He helps His character to shine forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness [holiness]. Jesus does not cover up sin or lessen the sense of guilt. And He does not try to criticize, but to save. The world had only disgust and mockery for this woman of sin. But Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner and offers to her a helping hand. While the Pharisees criticize her, Jesus tells her, ‘Go, and sin no more.’”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 462.

What tender compassion (mercy) and love on Jesus' part! Jesus handled the situation in such a way that the woman's accusers² would no longer bother her. This is because they never could be sure what she had read about their private lives on the ground that morning.



Jesus spoke words of comfort and hope to the woman caught in adultery.

In what ways was Jesus helping the accusers who brought this woman to Him in order to try to trap Him?

If you read the story carefully, you can see the compassion of Jesus even for those who were evil. If only they would open their hearts to Christ as this unfortunate woman did.

How would the usual Adventist church group handle a situation like this? How do we balance high moral (holy; right) standards with compassion for those who fall?

MONDAY—MAY 26**FOR THE CHILDREN (Matthew 19:13, 14)**

Children have been victims of much suffering over many hundreds

1. adultery—breaking the marriage vows by having sex with a person who is not one's spouse; not being faithful.

2. accusers—people who blame another person for doing something wrong or for breaking the law.

of years. Helpless and dependent, they often have been caught in war, public riots (fights), and family feuds (arguments). It was baby boys who were murdered during the first terrible “solution of the Jewish problem” under the pharaohs (kings) of Egypt (Exodus 1:15, 16). And it was baby boys who again were destroyed by Herod’s soldiers (Matthew 2:16). Matthew also remembers another time when children were murdered at the start of the Babylonian captivity (slavery) (Matthew 2:17, 18; read also Jeremiah 31:15). Jesus probably learned while on His mother’s knees about Herod’s killing the children. How keenly Jesus must have remembered it! Jesus knew that these innocent little ones had died, in a sense, because of Him. (He had come to die for them; but before He was old enough even to begin His mission, they had died because of Him.)

How do Matthew 18:2–6 and Matthew 19:13–15 show Jesus’ love and concern for babies and children? What messages do we get from these stories about how we should treat children?

Those children sat on Jesus’ lap that day. Jesus’ hand had been raised to bless them. What might their future have been? What memories did those old enough to remember take from that day? Did some of them later accept Jesus as Messiah? And how must they have felt to know that



Jesus showed love and concern for babies and children.

the loving Person (Jesus) who had put His hands on them in blessing was now in the highest heavens working as High Priest for them? How much hope that must have brought them! Politicians kiss babies for their parents’ votes. But Jesus loved the children for their own sake. For example, He ordered the disciples, “ ‘Let the little children come to me. Don’t [do not] keep them away. The kingdom of heaven belongs to people like them’ ” (Matthew 19:14, NIV).

What children are under your care? How do you act toward them? Think carefully about how you treat them. What steps can you take to make sure your influence³ is as positive as possible?

3. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

TUESDAY—MAY 27**FOR THE LAZARUS FAMILY
(John 11:5)**

We do not know a great deal about the Lazarus family of Bethany. The Gospels⁴ give us little information about them. But it seems clear that they were three unmarried adults: one brother and two sisters keeping house together. Probably they were not your usual Jewish family. But that is where Jesus chose to go whenever He came to Bethany. John informs us that “Jesus loved Martha and her sister [Mary] and [their brother] Lazarus” (John 11:5, NIV).

Study the event recorded in Luke 10:38–42. How did Jesus handle Martha? How did He show His loving compassion?

Martha seems to have been right in asking Mary to help her. After all, the meal was an important part of Eastern hospitality.⁵ And preparing it was important, too. Perhaps the Lazarus family was too poor to afford servants. So Martha in the kitchen needed help. To us, Jesus' answer to her seems to be rude and uncaring.

Perhaps the key to understanding it is to consider the wider scope of Jesus' mission. For Jesus, nothing was common. Jesus' own parents discovered this fact during the event

at the temple (Luke 2:48, 49). For Jesus, the future depended upon every minute of His time with us. When we keep this in mind, kitchen work seemed unimportant even though many people thought it was important.

Still, we misunderstand Jesus if we think He was uncaring to Martha. This is not true. The Gospels do not give us video clips of the events they report. We cannot see the face of Jesus as He answered Martha. We cannot hear the sadness in His voice. By what we know of Jesus elsewhere in the Gospels, we may imagine Him rising from His place as He talks to Martha. He lovingly calls her name twice. “Martha, Martha,” Jesus says, perhaps even following her into the kitchen. He continues, “there's [there is] something more important than entertaining. And Mary has found it” (Luke 10:41, 42, adapted).



Mary sat at Jesus' feet to hear His words.

4. Gospels—the four books of the New Testament that tell the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

5. hospitality—making visitors feel welcome in your home; welcoming guests into your home and taking good care of them by feeding them and giving them a place to stay.

Suppose you were in Martha's position. In what ways would you be so busy with worldly things that you forget what is really important? More importantly, how can you tell if important things on your list are not in the right order?

WEDNESDAY—MAY 28

FOR HIS ENEMIES (Matthew 5:44)

One of Jesus' most famous sayings is found in Matthew 5: 44–48. Review the verses. What is the important part of this message to all who would follow Jesus?

Christ's whole life and death were examples of this principle. That is loving your enemies and doing good even to those who do not do you good.

After the fall of Adam and Eve, the whole world became *enemy territory* (land). It is the home of fallen and rebellious beings living in opposition to God. But what did God do to this enemy planet? Did He send an army of angels down to sweep it away in its sin? No, instead, God sent Jesus, His Son, who came in order to save the world, not to punish it.

What examples can you find in the Gospels that show the love of Jesus, even for His enemies? Which ones do you remember the best?

How about Jesus' healing the ear of the servant when Peter cut it off (Luke 22:50, 51)? Or how about the time Jesus showed Judas His foreknowledge of what Judas was going to do? He gave Judas another opportunity (a chance) to turn away from his sin (Matthew 26:25).

Of course, the greatest example has to be Jesus' prayer to the Father as He was being crucified (to be put to death on the cross): "Father, forgive them. They don't [do not] know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34, NIV). In many ways that is the greatest example of love for those who do not deserve it. They did not know what they were doing. But they had no excuse. During His time here, Jesus gave plenty of opportunities, to both Jews and Romans, to know who He was. At least they should have known enough to know that Jesus did not deserve what He was getting. But Jesus showed His compassion (mercy) for them anyway.



Jesus healed the ear of the servant after Peter cut it off.

It is one thing to say you are supposed to love your enemies but it is another to do it. What is the key to showing this kind of spirit in your own life? How willing are you to make the necessary changes to love your enemies?

THURSDAY—MAY 29

FOR ISRAEL (Matthew 23:37)

How is the character of Jesus shown in Matthew 23:37? What does it tell us about God's love for His people? What does it tell us about the limits of what love can do? At the same time before you start blaming others ask yourself: How might those words point directly to me?

Suppose God shared the same emotions as humans (people). Then the story of His relationship with Israel would add up to 4,000 years of almost continuous disappointment. To be sure, there were high points, times when the nation brought God joy. But those times were rare and very short. In due time, God's great patience ran out. He gave the nation (Israel) a period of 490 years (Daniel 9:24) that would continue until the coming of Messiah. Jesus was that Messiah. And what we find in Him is an attitude⁶ of compassion, a love at once tough and tender.

6. attitude—a way of thinking, acting, or feeling.

How does Matthew 23:25–35 show an example of Jesus' tough love?

These verses show God's great patience nearing its end. God may sometimes be made angry. But tenderness breaks through Jesus' toughness. Jesus would not have spoken those rough words if there were no hope that some of these people would later admit their mistakes.

Notice who was also "obedient to the faith" in Acts 6:7. Might some of them have been among those Jesus scolded earlier? What is the message to us about being quick to judge or criticize?

FRIDAY—MAY 30

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, " 'Lazarus, Come Forth,' " pages 524–536; "Before Annas and the Court of Caiaphas," pages 710–715; "Judas," pages 720–722, in *The Desire of Ages*.

"In the work of soul-winning, words carefully and wisely spoken are needed. The Savior never tried to hide the truth. But He spoke it always in love. When Jesus dealt with people, He used words with the greatest care. He was always kind and thoughtful. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a rough word. He never gave unnecessary pain to a sensitive

soul. He did not criticize human⁷ weakness. He fearlessly rebuked hypocrisy [being two-faced], unbelief, and sin. But tears were in His voice as He spoke His strongest rebukes. He never made truth cruel. But He always showed a deep love for humans. Every soul was very important to Him. He carried Himself nobly. But He showed the kindest compassion [mercy] and respect to every member of the family of God. He saw souls in all people and knew that it was His mission to save them.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, page 117.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Think about this idea of loving your enemies. What does that mean, in everyday life to you? How is this love to be shown? Is there a time when it would be impossible to love your enemies? If so, what might that situation be?
- ❷ What is the situation of the children in your local church? How much attention is paid to their needs? How could you as a church be doing more for the children?
- ❸ Why is it easy to confuse love with cheap grace?⁸ What danger is there of letting people get away with things, just because we want to show them love? When is love sometimes best shown by strict, moral rules? How can we find the right balance? If you are to make mistakes, on which side is it best for us to make them?
- ❹ What comparisons can you find between the Jewish nation (when it was under God's rule) and the Seventh-day Adventist Church today? What lessons should we learn from their example? Are we learning them?

7. human—of, or concerning, men, women, or children.

8. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.