

# The Son of God Among Us



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matthew 23; Mark 9:12; Luke 24:7; John 1:1–14, 29; Heb. 2:9.*

**Memory Text:** “The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ, the Word of life” (1 John 1:1, NLT).

**Key Thought:** Nobody else in history has had such a huge impact on the world or such a divided opinion as much as Jesus. The future of each of our lives comes down to one crucial question Jesus Himself asked: “Who do you say I am?” (Matt. 16:15, NIV).

Some people today dispute whether Jesus ever lived, but the historical evidence is overwhelmingly clear. The real issue concerns His identity and purpose. Was He just a good man or God's Son?

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.”—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1960), p. 52.

As Adventists, we work from the starting point that the Bible is the Word of God and that what it says about Jesus is the truth, period. We do not have the time to waste on nonsensical high-critical speculations about whether Jesus did the things the Bible says that He did.

After all, if we cannot believe the Bible, what can we believe?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 26.*

## Who Was Jesus? Part 1

Over the centuries, people have argued about Jesus, sung about Him, written about Him, preached about Him, cursed Him, made movies about Him, even died for Him; but most people in the world today either do not know Him or know only what He has accomplished in their behalf.

**If** someone were to ask you, Who was Jesus? what would you say, and why?

Your answer, whatever it contained, should have dealt with the fact that Jesus was the divine Son of God and that He died for our sins and rose again. That He did great things while here is fine; that He preached powerful sermons is fine; that He revealed to us the character of God is fine. But none of these things, in the end, really matter if Jesus did not come and die as the Substitute for us, thus giving each of us the promise of eternal life (if we but claim it for ourselves).

**Why** is the death of Jesus, and what it accomplished, so crucial in helping us understand who Jesus was? *Mark 9:12, Luke 24:7, John 1:29, Rom. 5:15–21, Heb. 2:9.*

There have through history been many great men and women who have accomplished marvelous things, things that on the surface seemed even more impressive than what Jesus of Nazareth had accomplished. After all, He was an “unofficial” rabbi from a relatively small and insignificant province of Rome who died an early death and left just a handful of fearful and demoralized followers. On the other hand, when we grasp who Jesus was and just what He did while here, we realize that nothing that any other human being could have done is even worth comparing with Him. In fact, in the end, without Jesus and what He did for us, anything that anyone ever accomplished in this world would, in the large scheme of things, ultimately come to nothing. Because without Jesus and His death, the whole world and everything in it would come to nothing.

## Who Was Jesus? Part 2

What made Jesus unique in human history? It certainly was not a powerful public relations and marketing team. He did not have one. It certainly was not His wealth. He did not have any, at least not as the world understands wealth. And He did not have any political power to speak of either. On the contrary, He had been essentially on the margins of political power.

Jesus did have power, but it was a selfless power. He healed diseases, restored broken lives, and left pious hypocrites speechless. He once said to His disciples, “ ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all’ ” (*Mark 10:42–44, NIV*). Not exactly a formula for those aggressively seeking political power, is it?

**Read John 1:1–14.** What is found in these texts that reveals to us why Jesus was so special, unique, in all human history?

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We can read these famous words so often that we tend to forget just how incredible they really are. Dwell on the implications of what John is telling us. These should be words filled with hope, especially in contrast to the teachings of modern science, which has us all here as the mere by-products of some great cosmic accident, the result of blind forces that, purely by chance, created humanity. In other words, instead of us being the creations of a loving God, One who became “flesh, and dwelt among us” (*John 1:14*), we are just a complicated conglomeration of chemicals that just happened to form on the surface of this planet, and just as there was no meaning or purpose to our creation, there is no meaning and purpose to lives and deaths. What a contrast to the hope offered us through Jesus.

**What do you find especially encouraging about those verses in John 1? Write down your thoughts and bring them to class on Sabbath.**

## Jesus Among Sinners and Publicans

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was also a human who lived and dwelt among us. As such, He had various kinds of human interactions, both with family and friends. The amazing thing about Christ was not so much that as a human He had interaction with other people; no, what is amazing is that He chose to interact with certain types of people.

**Read** Matthew 11:19; Mark 2:15, 16; Luke 15:1, 2. What kind of people was Jesus associating with? What kind of people in your own society might have elicited the same response from other more “respectable” folk?

Jesus came to reveal the character of God to all the world through both His life and His death. By associating with those who were considered, at least by worldly standards, lowlifes, Jesus was giving us a message about the character of God and about what God deems good and bad. As humans, we tend to look at the outward appearances (*1 Sam. 16:7*); God, though, looks at the heart, where He can see what we often do not.

**Read** Matthew 21:28–32. How does that help us understand why Jesus associated with the kinds of people He did? What important message can we, those who are “religious and respectable,” take from this?

Unlike us, Jesus knew the heart; Jesus saw what was going on inside those who, from the outside, looked so unworthy and so unpromising. At the same time, He knew what was going on inside those who, from the outside, looked so righteous and pious. We might be able to fool each other, and even ourselves, but never the Lord.

**What is your attitude toward the “publicans and sinners” of your own society? How much of the attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees do you harbor in your own heart? (Remember, these men were exceedingly self-deceived.)**

## Exposing the Hypocrites

**“But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in”** (*Matt. 23:13*).

Though we often picture the kind and gentle Jesus working gingerly and softly with the worst of sinners, that is not the whole picture presented in the Bible. On the contrary, when the time was right Jesus unleashed a torrent of warnings about and toward a certain group of people. As we all know, Jesus had strong words to speak against many of the religious leaders of ancient Israel, very strong words, in fact. Indeed, in some ways He sounded just as some of the Old Testament prophets did; which, of course, is not surprising, because He was the One who inspired them to write what they did to begin with. Thus, for centuries, in one venue or another, Jesus was pleading with His people. Is it any different today?

**Read Matthew 23. What were the charges Jesus was leveling against the leaders? How would you categorize them? Which, in your own mind, would be the worst, and why? If you could summarize in just a few sentences the essence of His complaints, what would you write?**

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If you really read carefully, all the things that Jesus accuses them of doing are amazing. One theme, however, comes through very clearly: These men were hypocrites, hiding the ugliness of their souls under the veneer of faith and piety.

What kind of outward show of piety do you put on? How different are you in private than in public? How might your local church view you if they knew the real you? What can you do to make the real you more like the public version?

## Love for the Hypocrites

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8*).

**What** is the message of the above text? How seriously do we take it? That is, do we understand that Christ’s death included the worst sinners, even the hypocrites we read about yesterday?

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The amazing thing about the life of Jesus was that even amid the harshest circumstances He never lost sight of His mission: to save the lost. Even as He hung on the cross, even as the weight of the world’s sin was crushing out His life, the good of others was constantly on His mind. (*See Luke 23:34, 42, 43; John 19:26.*) What a powerful lesson for us, we who are called to follow in His footsteps.

This applies to the religious leaders that Jesus railed against. Yesterday we read His scathing denunciations against them, as recorded in Matthew 23.

**Read** Matthew 23:37. How is it different in tone from the rest of the chapter? What does this tell us about Jesus and His feelings toward even those He just denounced? What very important principle is found here for us? How can we take what we see here and apply it in our own lives and our treatment of others, even those who reject our overtures toward them?

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Missionary work is not easy. Look at what happened when Jesus Himself was here. Look at how so many reacted. Yet, even toward the worst Jesus showed love and care and compassion. Our feelings toward those who reject us should not be anger or resentment; they should be of pity, of concern, and of care. When people refuse to listen, they are not rejecting us personally; they are rejecting Jesus.

**How do you respond to those who react negatively toward your witness? How can you learn to feel compassion, as opposed to anger and resentment? Why would anger and resentment only make things worse?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Woes on the Pharisees,” pp. 610–620, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The Pharisees thought themselves too wise to need instruction, too righteous to need salvation, too highly honored to need the honor that comes from Christ. The Saviour turned away from them to find others who would receive the message of heaven. In the untutored fishermen, in the publican at the market place, in the woman of Samaria, in the common people who heard Him gladly, He found His new bottles for the new wine. The instrumentalities to be used in the gospel work are those souls who gladly receive the light which God sends them. These are His agencies for imparting the knowledge of truth to the world.”  
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 279.

“We may do much in a short time if we will work as Christ worked. We may reflect with profit upon His manner of teaching. He sought to meet the minds of the common people. His style was plain, simple, comprehensive. He took His illustrations from the scenes with which His hearers were most familiar. By the things of nature He illustrated truths of eternal importance, thus connecting heaven and earth.”  
—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 565.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is the idea of Jesus as just a great moral teacher not good enough? What hope do we have if Christ were only a moral teacher and nothing else? Look at the C. S. Lewis quote from the introduction for Sabbath’s study. Why is that such a powerful argument in favor of the deity of Christ? Or is it? What options do we have if Jesus isn’t the Son of God?
- ❷ As a class, discuss your answer to Monday’s last question.
- ❸ Whatever we might have to say about the Pharisees, one point we shouldn’t forget. They were members of God’s remnant church, the elite of the only faith in the world that had present truth. What’s the message, and warning, for us in that fact?

**Summary:** The story of Jesus is the most important story in history. His life and teachings show us not only the way to live and how to treat one another but also the way to eternal life—by believing in the salvation He brought to us through His death on the Cross.

## After-hours Ministry

Dr. Danielle is a dentist in southern Brazil. During the day she works to give people a more beautiful and healthy smile. But after hours, when her patients have gone and the dental hygienists have cleared away the day's tools, the dental clinic transforms into an evangelistic center, where she holds a small group Bible study.

Danielle always wanted to serve God, and she chose dentistry as a way to meet people and share her faith. But she wanted to do more, to sit with friends and patients and share deeply of God's love. It was then that the idea of creating a space in her clinic to study the Bible came about. Now, besides giving her patients quality dental care, she gives them a personal invitation to participate in the Bible study group.

Sandra, 32, accepted Danielle's invitation and came to the Bible study. "I came to participate, and I liked what I was hearing very much, so I invited a friend to the group," she said.

"I was invited by a friend to come to this Bible study group," Ruben, 30, said. "I came, and I really liked it, so I invited my mother to come. She, too, enjoyed the Bible study, and she invited my brother to come with her. Then she invited her husband. Now the entire family is studying the Bible together in this dental clinic."

Danielle is happy that she decided to expand her ministry beyond the dental chair. "The Bible study group grows because people are finding answers to their questions and their doubts," she says. "And when they find something that meets their needs, they invite their family and friends."

And the ministry of this group goes beyond casual Bible studies. So far the small group that meets in a dental clinic has led 60 people to baptism. "I want Jesus to return soon," Danielle says. "But I want as many of my friends and clients to be ready as possible. This is one small way I can share my faith with those with whom I have contact."

Every Christian knows someone, a friend, a neighbor, someone they meet at the store each week or at work every day who doesn't know the joy they've found in Jesus. Danielle's example challenges each of us to find a way to reach out to those we meet with the good news of salvation every day.



DANIELLE CARMEN ROVEDA (left) is a dentist in Curitiba, Paran, Brazil.