

Comrades in Arms



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Luke 5:6–8, 11; Mark 3:14; Matt. 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; 9:33–37; Matt. 20:20–28.*

Memory Text: “And they said to one another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’” (*Luke 24:32, NKJV*).

From the earliest days of His ministry, Jesus didn’t work alone. He chose humans to take part in preaching, teaching, and ministering. And though the four Gospels focus primarily on His life, death, and resurrection, they often do so in the context of His disciples, those closest to Him.

Thus, as the great controversy raged around Him, we can see it rage around the disciples, as well. Until the bitter end, when Jesus cried, “It is finished,” Satan found it impossible to make Jesus stumble and fall. Christ’s followers, however, were much easier prey. Their character flaws gave him inroads into them that were readily exploited.

Pride, doubt, stubbornness, self-importance, pettiness—whatever the flaws, these opened the way for Satan. Half of their problem was that they, having their own views of what they thought would and should happen, didn’t listen to what Jesus said would happen.

They had a lot of hard lessons to learn. So, no doubt, do we.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 20.

The Call of Peter

When one considers the incredible issue at stake in the great controversy, it's amazing that Jesus would use human beings to aid Him in ministry, especially those as flawed as the ones He chose. Of course, if we consider the state of fallen humanity, no one He chose would have been without moral defects anyway.

Walking along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, followed by a crowd of people, Jesus noticed two fishing boats whose owners were cleaning up after an unproductive night. These fishermen were already aware of Jesus. He had taught in their synagogue, where He astonished everyone with His words (*Luke 4:31, 32*). Jesus had even cast out a demon from a man in their synagogue, and everyone was amazed (*Luke 4:33–36*). They had seen Jesus at Peter's house healing Peter's mother-in-law (*Luke 4:38, 39*), and later that evening, healing many others (*Luke 4:40, 41*).

It is no wonder that a crowd was following Jesus along the beach. Jesus stepped into Peter's boat, asked Peter to push it out a little from the shore so that all could see Him, and then spoke to the people (*Luke 5:3*). When finished, He told Peter to throw his freshly cleaned net into the deep water. Peter surely thought that wouldn't achieve anything, but out of respect for Jesus he did as He said.

Read *Luke 5:6–8*. What does Peter's reaction teach us about him? How does it help us to understand why, despite Peter's obvious faults, Jesus chose him?

Peter's reaction is remarkable. Maybe it is parallel to Jacob wrestling with the angel—the same realization of Divine Presence, and an overwhelming sense of unworthiness (*Gen. 32:24–30*). One thing is clear. Peter became aware of his sinfulness because he knew that the Lord was there. His open confession of his sinfulness stands in stark contrast, for instance, to the reaction of some of the religious leaders, who referred to Jesus Himself as a sinner (*see John 9:24*) instead of acknowledging, even when in His presence, their own sinfulness.

Luke 5:11 says that they “forsook all” and followed Him, which meant that, when their nets were so full they were about to break, the men left it all to follow Jesus. What message is there for us here?

“With Him”

When Jesus called the first disciples on the shores of Galilee, they had already witnessed His power over evil. They had seen Him challenge demons (*Luke 4:34–36*), heal the sick (*Luke 4:38–41*), rule over nature (*Luke 5:4–6*), reveal sin, and then reassure Peter there was no need to fear (*Luke 5:10*).

Some time later, after praying all night (*Luke 6:12*), Jesus assembled His followers (disciples), and from that larger group chose 12, calling them apostles. (*Luke 6:13*; the Greek word *apostolos* means “to send out.”) Before Jesus sent them out, He spent some time with them giving them instructions (*Luke 9:1–5*) that were similar to the details He gave to a larger group of 70 some time later (*Luke 10:1–16*).

Read Mark 3:14. What did Jesus want the apostles to do before sending them out on their own? What message is here for all of us?

How many times are modern disciples more eager to race off and work for Jesus rather than spend time with Him? The simple reality is that when we go out to fulfill the gospel commission, racing off with our own to-do list, we bypass the Savior of the world and try to replace Him with ourselves. It is too easy to have a “Messiah complex,” thinking it is up to us to save the world, forgetting that Jesus alone is Savior.

One would not be too hard-pressed to say that so much of Christian history has been soiled by those who, professing the name of Jesus, had not spent time with Him, had not known Him, and had not been changed by Him. The last thing our world or the church needs are those running around in the name of Christ who have not been “with Him.” One of Satan’s greatest ploys in the great controversy has been his ability to co-opt those who claim the name of Christ and to use them to defile that name. Hence, before sending them off, Jesus wanted these men to be with Him in order, no doubt, to learn from Him.

What does it mean to us, today, without the physical, fleshly presence of Jesus, to be “with Him”? What are the practical real-time ways in which we today can have that time with Him?

Jesus' Dominion Over Nature

Read Matthew 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41, and Luke 8:22–25. How do we see the reality of the great controversy revealed in these texts?

Though we don't fully understand the degree to which Satan impacts the natural world, Scripture does reveal that his influence is there, such as seen in the story of Job (*see Job 1:18, 19*). Ellen G. White also tells us that, "Satan is even now seeking by disasters upon sea and land to seal the fate of as many as possible."—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 348, another indication of his power in this area. Surely, amid the seeming ceaseless natural disasters that strike the world, we are seeing the reality of the great controversy play out here on earth.

In this particular story, after a long day of teaching, when evening approached, Jesus suggested that He and the apostles go to the less inhabited opposite shore. Partway into their journey a fierce windstorm struck them suddenly, and waves crashed into the boat (*Mark 4:37*). Jesus was so exhausted He lay sleeping in the stern, seemingly oblivious. With the disciples so occupied in battling the storm, maybe it was some time before they realized that Jesus was asleep.

Jesus doesn't say anything when they first cry out to Him. He does not give any sermon to explain the predicament that they are in or suggest ways that the disciples can act to be victorious in the situation. He just stands up, raises His hand, and tells the wind and waves to settle down and be quiet, as if they are merely rowdy children.

At this the disciples are just overwhelmed with awe. They "feared exceedingly, and said to one another, 'Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!'" (*Mark 4:41, NKJV*).

Though the lessons are many here, with this story we can see the extent of Jesus' power and, thus, our need to trust Him, no matter what.

Though we can see the reality of the Lord's power, even over nature, the one place where He will not force that power is on our own will. What should this tell us about how careful we need to be with the sacred gift of free choice, and how should the reality of the great controversy make us even more careful in how we use that gift?

Who Is the Greatest?

Read Mark 9:33–37. What lesson did Jesus teach the disciples here, and what is the message here for anyone who claims to follow Jesus? *See also Matthew 18:3–5.*

This debate among the disciples was no doubt related to their views of the future. They thought that Jesus was going to deliver Israel from the Romans, restore the kingdom of David, and reign as its new king in all the glory that the nation experienced under King Solomon. When that would happen, they no doubt assumed that, as part of Christ’s inner circle, they’d have prominent and important roles to play in the newly restored kingdom. But even that wasn’t enough: they wanted to know who among them would be the “greatest” in the kingdom. If that doesn’t sound like the promptings of Lucifer, what does? (*See Isa. 14:14.*)

Read Matthew 20:20–28. How did Jesus answer this request? What was His main point?

Perhaps the most disappointing thing about this pathetic incident is its context. They were on their way to Jerusalem, where Jesus was about to be crucified. He had just explained to them that He was going to be betrayed, condemned to death, mocked, scourged, and crucified, and then rise again the third day (*Matt. 20:18, 19*). As soon as He finished saying all this, the question of who was greatest came up again. They did not even hear what Jesus had said. It was obvious that they were not listening. Interested in their own small-minded ambitions, they missed the large issues at stake, focusing on false concepts of an earthly kingdom that would never come and missing out on what Jesus was telling them about the eternal one that He was offering them through His own upcoming death.

It’s easy to think about how shortsighted and petty the disciples were. Look at yourself and ask: “What shortsightedness and pettiness do I need purged from my own soul?”

Divine Encounter With the Word

It was the third day after Jesus' death. His followers were still numb with shock. They thought He would crush the Romans, but the Romans had, it seemed, crushed Him instead.

Many disciples met together with the apostles after the Crucifixion. A group of women from their midst visited the tomb early Sunday morning. Luke names three of them, but there were others who had come with Jesus from Galilee (*Luke 23:55; 24:1, 10*). They returned from the empty tomb to tell the "eleven and. . . all the rest" of two men in shining clothes they had seen there (*Luke 24:9, NKJV*).

Luke records that on that Sunday afternoon two of Jesus' followers walked the two-to three-hour journey from Jerusalem back to their home in Emmaus (*Luke 24:13*). It is likely that they were so engrossed in their discussion of what had happened over the weekend that they did not notice a stranger walking nearby. Maybe they would never have noticed Him if He had not entered their conversation by asking why they were so sad (*Luke 24:17*).

This question really fired up the one called Cleopas. He wondered how the Stranger could be so ignorant of all the things that had happened. "What things?" the Stranger asked (*Luke 24:19*).

Read *Luke 24:19–35*. What did these people say that revealed their lack of understanding, and how did Jesus explain to them the truth?

Notice that Jesus' whole emphasis was on the Scriptures. Just as He resorted to Scripture in His battle with Satan in the wilderness, He goes to the Scriptures here in order to push back the darkness that these two were in. Only after He grounded them in the biblical teachings about Himself and His mission did Jesus then give them some powerful experiences to help buttress those biblical teachings: first, He revealed Himself to them, showing that He indeed had been raised from the dead; second, "He vanished from their sight" (*Luke 24:31, NKJV*). Between the no doubt perfectly clear Bible study on the atoning death of Jesus, followed by these powerful experiences, these two had plenty of reasons for faith.

Here, again, as all through the Gospels, we see Jesus keeping the Bible front and center. How, then, can we guard ourselves against any type of thinking that would cause us to question the authority of Scripture?

Further Thought: When here in the flesh, Jesus cast out demons (*Luke 6:18*), gave hope to the hopeless (*Luke 6:20–23*), showed people how to live out God’s *agape* love (*Luke 6:27–49*), healed the centurion’s servant (*Luke 7:2–10*), raised a widow’s dead son (*Luke 7:12–16*), stilled a storm (*Luke 8:22–25*), freed the demoniac at Gadara of his demons (*Luke 8:26–39*), healed a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (*Luke 8:43–48*), raised Jairus’s dead daughter (*Luke 8:41, 42, 49–56*), and even raised Lazarus from the dead after he had been dead for four days (*John 11:39–44*). All that He did, and so much more, and yet people still struggled to believe in Him. “Even Christ’s own disciples were slow to learn and to understand. Notwithstanding their love for Him and their reverence of His character, their faith in His being the Son of God wavered. Their frequent reference to the traditions of the fathers, and their continual misunderstanding of His discourses, show how difficult it was for them to free themselves from superstition.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 18, p. 116. Faith is a gift from God, but it is a gift that people can resist. And that’s because, as we have been warned, Satan is real, the great controversy is real, and the enemy works hard to cause us to doubt and disbelieve. Salvation is found through faith in what Christ has done for us; Satan knows that and thus will do everything he can to turn us away from that faith. Fortunately—and we must always remember this—Jesus is infinitely more powerful than the devil, and if we cling to Jesus, Satan cannot defeat us.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What answer would you give to someone who asked, “If Jesus has so much power over nature, why do so many people, even Christians, fall victim to natural disasters?” How does the reality of the great controversy fit into the answer?
- 2 What are some of the reasons we have for faith in Jesus and what the Bible says about Him? Why is it important to keep these reasons always before us? Also, despite the many good reasons we have, why do so many people struggle with faith? What are the things that cause us to doubt, and what is the best way to deal with them?
- 3 As we saw this week, Jesus chose some flawed people to work with Him. What hope does that give you in regard to how Jesus can use you, despite your own weaknesses?

“This Is Your Last Opportunity”: Part 1

For 45 years I worked for Satan as a priestess. My name is Dorandina, and I was a medium for spirits of the devil. People paid me well to tell them the future or to guide them in making a decision, or even to make an enemy sick. I would go into a trance and call upon a spirit to enter and speak through me. Then I would give the spirit’s answer to the person’s question.

I was a high priestess, called “Mother of Saints.” Many mediums have only one spirit, but I had different spirits come into me—sometimes even a legion of 1,000 evil angels! Often I performed my rituals in special places—on the beach, along the river, or in a cemetery, but always at night.

One night, I went to a cemetery to perform a ritual for a patron. After the ritual I was exhausted and fell asleep quickly. That night in a dream I saw a man with long, flowing brown hair, dressed in dazzling white. He had a book in one hand and a ring with many keys in the other hand. He told me, “These are the keys of the abyss [hell]. I have come in the name of your God. Follow Him. He has a plan for you.”

This dream was so different from anything I had dreamed before. It troubled me. But I began to think perhaps the dream had come because I was so tired. In time I forgot the dream.

Four years later, after a big satanic celebration, I again dreamed about the man dressed in white. Again he told me, “I have come in the name of your God. I have come to give you another chance.” I saw in his hand the Ten Commandments written on the tablets of stone. I awoke and tried to understand what the dream meant. But I did not understand, and in time I again forgot the dream.

Nearly two years later, I became very sick. I went to the Adventist hospital for surgery. I told my doctor about my dreams, and I asked him what he thought the dreams meant. The doctor talked to me about God and offered me some magazines and little booklets about God and prayer. But I threw them into the trash without reading them. I returned to my work for Satan and forgot about God and the angel in my dreams.

January 1 is a special day to worship the spirits. On that day several years ago I went to the cemetery to conduct the ceremonies that people had paid me to perform—one person wanted an enemy to become sick; another person wanted me to make a woman fall in love with a man. I had a list of rituals to perform on this big night, but I did not feel well. I had a fever. When I finally finished the ceremonies, I went to the hospital.

While in the hospital I lost consciousness and slipped into a coma for three days.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Luke 24:32*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Compare the different ways in which people, including the disciples, responded to the revelation of Jesus' true identity.

Feel: Appreciate that, despite human weakness, Jesus still calls him or her to proclaim His message of salvation.

Do: Choose Jesus over the things of this world.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The True Identity of Jesus Revealed

A What did the disciples learn about the identity of Jesus (*Matt. 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41*)?

B The concept of servant-leadership has become a popular management and leadership theory in the world today. How did Jesus articulate this principle (*Mark 9:33–37, Matt. 20:20–28*)?

II. Feel: A Receptive Heart: One's Own Choice

A Besides acknowledging one's own sinfulness, what else does the Bible tell us characterizes those who would be followers of Jesus (*Luke 24:32*)?

B What does it mean to leave everything in order to follow Jesus as the disciples did (*Luke 5:11*)?

III. Do: The Great Controversy and God's Law of Love

A In what ways can your heart burn within you at the revelation of Jesus through Scripture?

B List the things that you need to leave behind in order to follow Jesus. Share some with the class.

▶ **Summary:** Jesus does not ask us to follow Him without clearly revealing Himself to us. It is left for each of us to exercise our freedom of choice whether to receive or to reject the revelation. As individuals make their choices, they are acting their part in the great controversy.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Luke 24:32*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The Bible gives ample evidence of who Jesus is. Whether or not one has a heart that is receptive to that revelation is the thing that makes all the difference.

Just for Teachers: This week’s study challenges class members to see themselves among the crowds that followed Jesus, observing the responses of different individuals to the startling revelation of Christ’s majesty. Each member of the class must ask what his or her response will be to the revelation of Jesus in Scripture today.

Opening Activity: Ask willing class members to share a story from their own lives in which several individuals responded to the same stimulus differently. Where in the Scriptures are there similar stories of misidentification in spite of the necessary information for correct identification? In the case of Jesus, many saw the Son of God where others saw a sinner. Whom do you see? The power of correct identification cannot be overstated.

Consider This: The difference in perception of the identity of Jesus is not predetermined. Even though we are influenced by personal expectations and other factors that blind our view, there is still plenty of evidence that we need not fail in grasping the light that shines on our pathway.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The Gospel stories are replete with demonstrations of Jesus’ power—His power over demons, nature, sickness, and death. What a far superior demonstration of His Messianic calling than exercising His military might over the Romans!

Bible Commentary

I. Calling Flawed People to a Work of Cosmic Importance (*Review Mark 3:14 with your class.*)

Mark 3:14 speaks of Jesus appointing the Twelve and naming them apostles. The Greek word for “appointed” (*NRSV*), or “ordained” (*KJV*), is *poieo*, which means literally “to do” or “to make.” In other words, Jesus made them who they were. In the present context, we can also say that

Jesus constituted the apostles into a special group of twelve. The text also expresses the purpose, as well as the result, for which they were appointed; namely, (1) that they should be with Jesus and (2) that He might send them to preach.

Jesus called the twelve apostles from a larger pool of disciples. We might expect that these were the best people one could find. After all, it is Jesus who chose them. However, from a human perspective, the Twelve were a disappointment in many respects. Perhaps the choice of the Twelve should give us pause the next time we are tempted to grumble over the person elected or appointed to serve in a position of responsibility in the church. What makes a person the best choice is, first and foremost, whether the Lord can use the person or not. What Jesus needed then, and needs today, were individuals with teachable and receptive hearts and minds. This is what we see in Peter.

After Peter spent a long night at sea without catching any fish, Jesus told him to cast his net into the deep (*Luke 5:4–8*). What followed was a large catch of fish. To this miraculous manifestation of Christ's power, Peter responded, “ ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man’ ” (*Luke 5:8, NRSV*). He acknowledged his sinfulness and was willing to receive a clean heart from Jesus. This humility is what, ultimately, qualifies us to be servants of Christ.

Consider This: Discuss the significance of appointing the apostles to be with Jesus and then sending them out to preach.

II. Who Is This Man? True Identity of Jesus Revealed (*Review Matthew 8:23–27 with your class.*)

Matthew 8:23–27 (*see also Mark 4:35–41, Luke 24:19–35*) is the story of Jesus stilling the storm. In Matthew 8:27, the disciples were amazed, as they exclaimed: “ ‘Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?’ ” (*NKJV*). In the same way, the Gospels are concerned with this cardinal question: Who is Jesus?

Clearly the writers of the Gospels considered that the stories they had selected were convincing as a demonstration of Jesus' Messiahship. Indeed, they are powerful stories, which is why the disciples' lack of faith seems so hard for us to comprehend.

But before we wax eloquently in castigating the disciples for their lack of faith or the Pharisees for allowing their own preconceived notions (most of them unwarranted) of the Messiah to influence their view of Jesus, we must come to terms with how our own biases and preconceived notions of reality prevent us from seeing things in their true light.

Consider This: Many Jews rejected Jesus as the Son of God, in spite of the overwhelming evidence, due to wrong expectations of what the Messiah should be or do. What does this tell us about the power of preconceived ideas, or presuppositions, and biases?

III. The Servant Leaders *(Review Mark 9:33–37 with your class.)*

In Mark 9:33–37, Jesus taught, “ ‘If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all’ ” (*Mark 9:35, NKJV; see also Matt. 20:20–28*). This principle of servant-leadership has gained currency among management and leadership theorists. For readers of the Gospel story, this principle is nothing new. Jesus taught precisely this principle to the distraught apostles, who jostled for positions of preeminence in the hoped-for earthly kingdom of the Messiah. Even the disciples who had been with Jesus, individuals who had been carefully chosen and trained, would fail to understand the true mission of Jesus, much less the nature of His kingdom or what makes for greatness. How else to explain these misperceptions other than to place them in the context of the great controversy!

Consider This: What does the fact that the disciples misunderstood Jesus’ mission after being with Him for about three years tell us about being overly confident with our own perception of who Jesus is or of truth in general? Whatever truth we know, we need humility to realize that we are still greatly limited in what we understand.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The crucial thing for this week’s study is whether we correctly perceive who Jesus is and how that perception influences our acceptance of Christ and His work of salvation for us.

Thought/Application Questions:

❶ Compare Peter’s reaction after Jesus instructed him to cast his net into the deep, drawing forth a large catch of fish, with the reaction of those who refer to Jesus as a sinner, in John 9:24. What is the difference?

2 When Peter and his companions left everything to follow Jesus, what did everything include? What evidence did they have of who Jesus was by this time?

3 How are we to apply the principle of being with Jesus to our lives today before going out to proclaim the message?

4 What have you done with the evidence you have about who Jesus truly is?

Activity: Ask volunteers in the class to share stories where individuals have wrongly perceived other people or ideas, only to discover later that they were wrong. Lest we fall into the trap of making the acceptance of Christ merely a matter of intellectual assent, consider what happened to the hearts of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. How does this inform our response to the proclamation of the Word of God? We must not minimize the influence of the devil in preventing us from correctly perceiving truth. All the more reason we must humbly ask God not only to reveal Himself to us but to give us receptive and repenting hearts.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: A correct perception of who Jesus is leads us to marvel at His humility. He was first in serving, sacrificing, and dying for sinners. Have class members discuss how they would practice servant-leadership in their daily lives.

Activity: A correct understanding of who Jesus is comes from the study of His Word, properly interpreted and applied to the life. Ask class members to share how they interpret Scripture. What are some of the hermeneutical principles used?