

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Third Quarter 2016: *The Role of the Church in the Community*

Lesson 12 “Urban Ministry in the End Time”

Read for this week’s study

Acts 18:1–28; Exodus 2:23–25; Matthew 13:3–9, 18–23; John 15:12, 13; 2 Peter 3:9.

Memory Text

“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Nature of Cities
- III. Hearing the Groans
- IV. Sowing and Reaping in Cities
- V. Make It Personal
- VI. Reaching Out to the Cities
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. Jeremiah 29:7 encouraged God’s people to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you. . . if it prospers you too will prosper.” In context what is the city they are to support? What kinds of implications does that have for us today? Should we be praying for the Pope, for example, or the Vatican as a whole? Should we be praying for terrorists and dictators? (Sabbath afternoon)
2. Read Acts 18:1-28 for an account of Paul’s attempt to plant a church in one of the ancient world’s most famous cities. Compare what he did in Corinth with his approach to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-3), Berea (Acts 17:10-14), and Lystra (Acts 14:14-17). With non-Jewish people Paul began with creation. What kind of approach might be successful today? (Sunday’s lesson)
3. Read Exodus 2:23-25, Exodus 6:5, Psalm 12:5, Romans 8:18-24, Job 23:1-10 and 24:2-12. What is the message of these texts? What kinds of things move God to action? What do we know about this process? Can it be said that in some way God evolves? How much do people have to “groan” before God acts? How do you explain the silence of God in Job? Who was it that subjected the creation to futility according to Romans 8? What is the ultimate resolution of human groaning? (Monday’s lesson)

4. Read Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23. What does this passage teach us about ministering to our communities, including cities? What do you do in a place that has limited “good ground?” What role might spiritual gifts play in ministry to the “hard ground?” What would you consider the “hardest ground” in the city or territory where you live? (Tuesday’s lesson)
5. Read John 15:12-15, James 1:27 and Galatians 6:2. What do these texts suggest is the best way to reach out to other people with the gospel? (Wednesday’s lesson)
6. What do 1 Timothy 2:1-4, Romans 10:14-15 and 2 Peter 3:9 have to say about the importance of reaching out to others with the gospel? (Thursday’s lesson)
7. According to this week’s lesson, Ellen White is well known for her instruction to keep out of the cities. But a careful study of all she had to say on the topic gives a different picture. Most of the comments on moving out of the cities had to do with establishing institutions. Institutions would be most successful if established outside cities, but near enough to impact them. On the other hand, when it came to individuals or congregations, working for the cities was most effective when people moved into the cities in order to reach them where they are. How can we balance the need to reach people in the cities with the need to protect children from unhealthy influences and environments? (Friday’s lesson)
8. It is interesting that many early Adventist institutions, like Loma Linda University, Sydney Adventist Hospital and Washington Adventist Hospital, were established in relatively rural places but are now surrounded by the urban context. Should such institutions keep moving away from the cities or is there something different about today’s world that suggests working the cities from within may be the best approach? (Friday’s lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

As we have considered all along, all God wants in his family is peace and freedom. But to have peace and freedom, there must be mutual love and trust, maturity and self-control. Things like this cannot be commanded, or produced by force or fear. Instead God offers to set right and keep right everything that has gone wrong. That means to completely heal the damage done.

That is why when Jesus was here to demonstrate the truth about his Father and the plan of salvation, he spent most of his time healing, rather than preaching. It is not that he underestimated the influence and value of preaching, but there is no more eloquent way to demonstrate and illustrate the truth about God and his government, and what it would mean to set right everything that has gone wrong. He certainly didn’t practice the healing arts to attract people to his meetings. When he found people were coming for the wrong reason, he said something that caused most of them to go home.

When Jesus healed the paralytic at the pool, he was preaching by the very way in which he treated that man. It was a demonstration of the truth about God. Forbid the thought, but

imagine that you had terminal lung cancer. It was the result of a lifetime of smoking. You're sitting anxiously in the office of your physician. What would be the best possible news you could hear? Would it be for the physician to say, "I forgive you for smoking"—would forgiveness heal the damage done? You would still die. The only difference is that you would die forgiven.

Forgiveness would only help if your physician were accustomed to killing all his patients who contracted lung cancer because of a lifetime of smoking. If that is what he was accustomed to doing, it would be very relieving to have your physician say, "I forgive you." Now he won't have to kill you after all. But physicians do not kill their dying patients. The law would not permit it.

What if the physician should say instead, "I have very good news for you. I can completely make you well."

"How well did you say?"

"I can make you perfectly well, if you'll cooperate."

"You mean that though I have spent a lifetime smoking, and this is really my own fault, you can make me perfectly healthy again?"

"Yes, I can."

"Well, actually doctor, all I really want is to be forgiven."

Would you say anything so absurd? Yet so often we seem to say that to God. Would you rather say, "Doctor if that is true, how can I cooperate? What do you want me to do?" The doctor might say, "Well this will require some changes. But if you trust me enough to follow my instructions, I can absolutely guarantee that you will be perfectly restored." {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #14, "God can Completely Heal the Damage Done" recorded May, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/14MMCAG>*

As Christians, loyal members of the family, we all remember Christ's commission, the last text on the sheet, Matthew 24:14: "This Good News about the Kingdom [and especially the way the King runs His kingdom], will be preached through all the world . . . and then the end will come" (GNB). Could you conceive of any higher honor or pleasure, or privilege, than to join with the loyal angels in making this good news known to all the world, this everlasting truth about our God? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #16, "God's Last Pleading with His Children" recorded May, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/16MMCAG>*

The bad news is spread all over the world about God. If we're his friends, we'll be jealous for his reputation. Even to the point of indignation. Well, let's hope that's expressed in a constructive way and only stirs us to spread the good news with more energy than ever before.

I think the greatest change that could come to our church would for us to realize that our commission is to spread the good news to all the world. And the good news is not about us, the good news is about God. And the good news is that God is a certain kind of a person, and that we should be very jealous for his reputation. And it's time for those of us who may share some of Paul's jealousy to speak up with more of his firmness, almost frightening power sometimes. When Paul said, "If even an angel of heaven should come with a false picture of God, I will denounce it as wrong. God is not as he is so widely represented. He is like this!" Then one should be able to say what he is like. Could we?

Would it be safe to say that there's one statement as a church we have never made? It doesn't appear in our statements of belief. You don't have to say you believe in it to be baptized. Believe a list of important things to be sure. But to take a certain position in the great controversy about God that is great good news, it is not asked of us. And there's no statement of the position we've taken. No wonder we're famous for all kinds of other things, as in *U. S. News & World Report*, where we were summarized. Our beliefs included only vegetarianism and the judgment. And I've seen worse lists than that. Well, we have some important things to say about vegetarianism and the judgment. But the everlasting good news is about God. Why aren't we known for our position about God? Paul was, and he suffered a lot for it, but he was very proud of it, and he gave this good news in all his letters, and right until he died. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 2, recorded October, 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links: <http://pkp.cc/3MMROMANS66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/4MMROMANS66>)Part 2)*

Paul devoted himself to evangelism. He arrives in Athens, appears on Mars Hill, and he delivers a very erudite presentation. He shows that he really knows his Greek. And you'd have to do that in Athens, wouldn't you? So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said, "Men of Athens, I perceive," now, which version shall we use? "That in all things ye are most superstitious." One of the fundamental principles one learns in public speaking is that you do not antagonize your audience in the first sentence if you hope to persuade them later on. And to say they were "very superstitious" in the modern idiom would not be polite. Well, he didn't. What he said in Greek was, "Oh men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are," the longest word in the Greek New Testament, "*deisidaimonesterous*". That's all one word and it means "very religious." Do any of your versions have that? Acts 17:22. It's a compliment. He didn't insult his audience.

He was very winsome. This is after Damascus Road. “Oh, Athenians,” he said, “I see that you are very religious,” and then he goes on to explain how very religious they were. He said, “Why, as I passed through your city, I found representations of all the gods I’ve ever heard of. That’s how religious you are. I even found an altar to the unknown god.” Now, that’s being very, very religious! “Now it so happens that I know this unknown god, and I have come to tell you about him.” Now, there’s one skillful introduction to a public presentation! He complimented them. He turned their idolatry into a compliment. Isn’t that the only way to go? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Acts*, recorded April, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links: <http://pkp.cc/59MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/60MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)*

Now it’s a great privilege to be the one who gets there with the good news, but sometimes somebody else gets there first. Think of missionaries who have been shipwrecked on the reef as they’re about to arrive on an island to somehow “turn those cannibals into Christians.”

And as they’re drowning out there, here come these cannibals paddling their canoe. And they say farewell to each other; they know what’s going to happen shortly. But instead, the cannibals put them in their canoe and take them to the beach and revive them. And finally when they’re comfortable, the missionary says, “Now let us assemble these people and give them the truth.” And he starts to preach to them about love.

His missionary wife nudges him and says, “Wait a minute. These people risked their lives to rescue us from the reef!”

The minister says, “But nobody’s preached to them yet.”

Well, remember Romans 2. “The Spirit of God in many and various ways has approached people.” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #11, “What Went Wrong in God’s Universe?” recorded January, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/2MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

The Saviour’s words, “Ye are the light of the world,” point to the fact that He has committed to His followers a world-wide mission. In the days of Christ, selfishness and pride and prejudice had built strong and high the wall of partition between the appointed guardians of the sacred oracles and every other nation on the globe. But the Saviour had come to change all this. The words which the people were hearing from His lips were unlike anything to which they had ever listened from priest or rabbi. Christ tears away the wall of partition, the self-love, the dividing

prejudice of nationality, and teaches a love for all the human family. He lifts men from the narrow circle that their selfishness prescribes; He abolishes all territorial lines and artificial distinctions of society. He makes no difference between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. He teaches us to look upon every needy soul as our neighbor and the world as our field. {MB 42.2}

The stay of Jesus in Samaria was designed to be a blessing to His disciples, who were still under the influence of Jewish bigotry. They felt that loyalty to their own nation required them to cherish enmity toward the Samaritans. They wondered at the conduct of Jesus. They could not refuse to follow His example, and during the two days in Samaria, fidelity to Him kept their prejudices under control; yet in heart they were unreconciled. They were slow to learn that their contempt and hatred must give place to pity and sympathy. But after the Lord's ascension, His lessons came back to them with a new meaning. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they recalled the Saviour's look, His words, the respect and tenderness of His bearing toward these despised strangers. When Peter went to preach in Samaria, he brought the same spirit into his own work. When John was called to Ephesus and Smyrna, he remembered the experience at Shechem, and was filled with gratitude to the divine Teacher, who, foreseeing the difficulties they must meet, had given them help in His own example. {DA 193.4}

The Saviour is still carrying forward the same work as when He proffered the water of life to the woman of Samaria. Those who call themselves His followers may despise and shun the outcast ones; but no circumstance of birth or nationality, no condition of life, can turn away His love from the children of men. To every soul, however sinful, Jesus says, If thou hadst asked of Me, I would have given thee living water. {DA 194.1}

This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ. Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. No sooner does he come to know the Saviour than he desires to make others acquainted with Him. The saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life. In doing this work a greater blessing is received than if we work merely to benefit ourselves. It is in working to spread the good news of salvation that we are brought near to the Saviour. {MH 102.3}

Heavenly beings still visit the earth as in the days when they walked and talked with Abraham and with Moses. Amid the busy activity of our great cities, amid the multitudes that crowd the thoroughfares and fill the marts of trade where from morning till evening the people act as if business and sport and pleasure were all there is to life, where there are so few to contemplate unseen realities—even here heaven has still its watchers and its holy ones. There are invisible agencies observing every word and deed of human beings. In every assembly for business or pleasure, in every gathering for worship, there are more listeners than can be seen with the

natural sight. Sometimes the heavenly intelligences draw aside the curtain which hides the unseen world that our thoughts may be withdrawn from the hurry and rush of life to consider that there are unseen witnesses to all we do or say. {COL 176.2}

We need to understand better than we do the mission of the angel visitants. It would be well to consider that in all our work we have the co-operation and care of heavenly beings. Invisible armies of light and power attend the meek and lowly ones who believe and claim the promises of God. Cherubim and seraphim and angels that excel in strength—ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands—stand at His right hand, “all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.” Hebrews 1:14. {COL 176.3}

The result of the work of Jesus, as He sat, weary and hungry, at the well, was wide-spread in blessing. The one soul whom He sought to help became a means of reaching others and bringing them to the Saviour. This is ever the way that the work of God has made progress on the earth. Let your light shine, and other lights will be kindled. {GW 195.3}

He was the teacher sent by God to instruct mankind. As one in whom all restorative power is found, Christ spoke of drawing all men unto Him, and of giving the life everlasting. In Him there is power to heal every physical and every spiritual disease. {LHU 167.5}

He [Christ] passed by no human being as worthless, but sought to apply the healing remedy to every soul. In whatever company He found Himself He presented a lesson appropriate to the time and the circumstances. Every neglect or insult shown by men to their fellowmen only made Him more conscious of their need of His divine-human sympathy. He sought to inspire with hope the roughest and most unpromising, setting before them the assurance that they might become blameless and harmless, attaining such a character as would make them manifest as the children of God. . . . {LHU 183.2}

Though He was a Jew, Jesus mingled freely with the Samaritans, setting at nought the Pharisaic customs of His nation. In face of their prejudices He accepted the hospitality of this despised people. He slept with them under their roofs, ate with them at their tables—partaking of the food prepared and served by their hands—taught in their streets, and treated them with the utmost kindness and courtesy. And while He drew their hearts to Him by the tie of human sympathy, His divine grace brought to them the salvation which the Jews rejected. {LHU 183.3}

Wherever hearts are open to receive the truth, Christ is ready to instruct them. He reveals to them the Father, and the service acceptable to Him who reads the heart. For such He uses no parables. To them, as to the woman at the well, He says, “I that speak unto thee am he” (*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 25-28). {LHU 183.6}