

## 10. Lord of Our Labor

**Biblical material:** Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:15; 3:17-19; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12; Acts 10:36-43; Ephesians 4:28; Matthew 25:14-30.

### Quotes:

- He who labours, prays. [Lat., Qui laborat, orat.] *In a sermon to the people of Queenhith, advertised in the "Daily Courant", Oct. 6, 1709*
- He who prays and labours lifts his heart to God with his hands. [Lat., Qui orat laborat, cor levat ad Deum cum manibus.] *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*
- The fight is never about grapes or lettuce. It is always about people. *Cesar Chavez*
- A wise and frugal government, which shall leave men free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor and bread it has earned—this is the sum of good government. *Thomas Jefferson*

### Introductory questions

What is Paul's point in 2 Thess. 3 regarding work? Is it that we should be toiling and not accepting help—or is it about accountability? How does the example of Jesus relate (Acts 10)? Why "must" we work (Eph. 4:28)? Why did God connect the cursing of the ground and the need for labor—is this the way things were meant to be? How is God the Lord of our labor?

### Discussion ideas

In our minds we often equate labor and work with unpleasant requirements. We work hard so we can do what we really want—take vacations! So—is work a necessary evil? Or can we see more to work than something that takes our time and stops us doing what we would prefer to do? How does our work reflect our beliefs and how is this part of our witness to the universe?

Heaven has traditionally been equated with eternal rest. But is this an attractive proposition? What of those who really enjoy their work, and find great fulfillment in what they do? There is a need to re-balance our ideas of both work in this life, and what will occupy us in the hereafter.

How is God the Lord of our labor? Does he care what work we do, or is it our attitude to work that is more important? It would seem that with the right perspective we can "work through our work" and reveal the kind of God we know. While all labor contains "boring" elements, recognizing how work can be both fulfilling for ourselves and useful to others is an important aspect of true belief.

What about issues involving labor unions? We may have divergent views—are we on the side of the "bosses" or the "workers"? Recognize how such debates have affected history—think of Marx/Engels, for example! What's wrong with communism? Or is this getting too political?!

How does the parable of the talents apply (Matt. 25)? What was wrong in the servant hiding the master's money—wasn't that simply a good safeguard? What about the servant's response that he knew the master was a hard man? Is this a good representation of the nature of God, or does it say more about the nature and attitude of a servant? See how our response to such questions also contributes to answering the issues in great controversy, and whether we see ourselves as God's friends or simply his servants, his "employees."

## **Ellen White Comments**

God's servants are to work together, blending in kindly, courteous order, "in honor preferring one another." Romans 12:10. There is to be no unkind criticism, no pulling to pieces of another's work; and there are to be no separate parties. Every man to whom the Lord has entrusted a message has his specific work. Each one has an individuality of his own, which he is not to sink in that of any other man. Yet each is to work in harmony with his brethren. In their service God's workers are to be essentially one. No one is to set himself up as a criterion, speaking disrespectfully of his fellow workers or treating them as inferior. Under God each is to do his appointed work, respected, loved, and encouraged by the other laborers. Together they are to carry the work forward to completion. {AA 275-6}

Position and influence, be they ever so exalted, should not be made an excuse for misappropriating the Lord's goods. The special favors of God should stimulate us to render wholehearted and affectionate service to Him; but many who are thus blessed forget the Giver, and become reckless, defiant, and profligate. They dishonor the God of heaven, and wield an influence that curses and destroys their associates. They do not seek to lessen the sufferings of the needy. They do not build up the work of God. They do not seek to redress the wrongs of the innocent, to plead the cause of the widow and the orphan, or to reveal a lofty pattern of character before high and low, showing a spirit of beneficence and virtue. But on the contrary, they oppress the hireling; they keep back by fraud the just recompense for labor, cheat the innocent, rob the widow, and heap up treasure corroded with the blood of souls. They will have to render an account at the bar of God. This class are not doing the will of the Father in heaven, and they will hear the stern command, "Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." {CS 127-8}

## **Extra material**

Visiting us when we lived by the coast, our nephews loved a day on the beach. Even in Scotland during less than tropical weather! In fact, building sandcastles became more of a civil engineering project just than a pleasant pastime...

We'd arrive on the beach (usually deserted!) with garden spades ready to challenge the elements. Making sure the tide was on the rise, we'd build as close to the shoreline as we dared--great castle mounds with defensive walls and ditches. Then like King Canute we'd dare the sea to attack, which it inevitably did.

One by one the great line of battlements would fall before the onrushing waves. Despite all our best efforts to repair the damage, soon we were isolated on our castles, shouting at the sea to go back. In time, even they were overwhelmed, and we had to retreat in ignominious defeat to dry land, watching the waves crash over our great constructions as if they were nothing.

Wet-foot, we'd return home, vowing that at our next visit we'd build bigger castles, better walls, deeper ditches—yet knowing in our hearts that we would always be defeated. A parable of the world, and humanity's efforts to build a secure future?

However much we labor here, working to accomplish our dreams, we need to keep in mind the eternal that lies beyond such transience. Our work must be focussed on more than pleasing ourselves in that self-centered sense. For what does it profit a man...?

Only as we place ourselves in the stream of God's intent, working together for things of true value, do we find real contentment and pleasure in our work. None of us want to think we have lived in vain, and yet we so often place our value on things that do not satisfy and work for that which is not bread.

Only as God is at the center of our life mission will we find he is the Lord of our labor.

## 11. Lord of Our Worship

**Biblical material:** Psalms 95:6, 7; 99:9; Revelation 5:8-14; 14:6, 7; John 2:13-16; Acts 4:24-31; Colossians 3:16; Psalms 47; 63:1-4; 150.

### Quotes:

- We need to worship and adore as well as to analyze and explain. *Isobel Kuhn*
- A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word 'darkness' on the walls of his cell. *C. S. Lewis*
- We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God. *A. W. Tozer*
- Man is not made to question, but adore. *Edward Young*

### Introductory questions

What is the meaning of worship? How do we "do" worship? What does it mean to "worship in spirit and in truth"? How do we best worship—is there a formula we can apply? Does the example of Jesus help—can God worship God? What is the most important part of worship? What is at the heart of false worship?

### Discussion ideas

Psalm 95:6, 7 tells us to worship because he is our God. Do devils worship, even though God is their God also? Isn't worship more about our attitude to God than the mere existence of God?

Worship has come to mean many things to many people. To some it is the pomp and circumstance of ritual and liturgy. To others it is the act of being in church. To others still it is something we do—we "do" worship.

But at its heart the word means giving someone their worth. In other words, an expression of how we think of someone, the positive attitude of respect and appreciation. *You cannot truly worship without thought and admiration.*

Psalm 99:9 tells us to worship because God is holy. Again, what do we understand by this word? Would it work, for example, to tell people on the street that they must worship God because he is holy? Clearly we have to explain ourselves!

Revelation 5 gives us clear reasons for worship—why God is worthy. Worth involved the concept of ascribing value, indicating what we think is really our treasure. Worship is saying that God is *worth-while*. Jesus spent much time trying to explain the importance of identifying true values, what was really important as opposed to what we usually value—what we "give worth" to. So worship reorders our priorities, and reveals to us and others what we really think is vital.

Why is the story of Jesus' cleansing of the temple (John 2) included here? Is it because the lesson preparers see this as a compelling example of false worship? Since we do not do these things in church, should we then conclude our worship is fine?

Colossians 3:16 closely links worship and *gratitude*. What are the implications? Here we begin to see the real basis for true worship. It is in the recognition of God as he truly is that we *want* to worship him, to thank him and to praise him for his presence in our lives. Worship is very personal, and cannot be defined by ritual. The sense of awe and grandeur at the beauty in nature brings us to reflect and worship the God of creation—and this can be very far from church. In all that we do, we need to keep a consciousness of God. This is worship.

## Ellen White Comments

The Teacher from heaven, no less a personage than the Son of God, came to earth to reveal the character of the Father to men, that they might worship him in spirit and in truth. Christ revealed to men the fact that the strictest adherence to ceremony and form would not save them; for the kingdom of God was spiritual in its nature. Christ came to the world to sow it with truth. He held the keys to all the treasures of wisdom, and was able to open doors to science, and to reveal undiscovered stores of knowledge, were it essential to salvation. He presented to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God, and sought to impress upon men the paternal love of the Father, who [JOHN 3:16 quoted.] He urged upon men the necessity of prayer, repentance, confession, and the abandonment of sin. He taught them honesty, forbearance, mercy, and compassion, enjoining upon them to love not only those who loved them, but those who hated them, who treated them spitefully. In this he was revealing to them the character of the Father, who is long-suffering, merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, and full of goodness and truth. Those who accepted his teaching were under the guardian care of angels, who were commissioned to strengthen, to enlighten, that the truth might renew and sanctify the soul. Christ declares the mission he had in coming to the earth. He says in his last public prayer [JOHN 17:25, 26 quoted] {CE 74-5}

The Pharisees sought distinction by their scrupulous ceremonialism, and the ostentation of their worship and charities. They proved their zeal for religion by making it the theme of discussion. Disputes between opposing sects were loud and long, and it was not unusual to hear on the streets the voice of angry controversy from learned doctors of the law. In marked contrast to all this was the life of Jesus. In that life no noisy disputation, no ostentatious worship, no act to gain applause, was ever witnessed. Christ was hid in God, and God was revealed in the character of His Son. To this revelation Jesus desired the minds of the people to be directed, and their homage to be given. {DA 261}

## Extra material

It's so easy to follow the Devil's leading and paint the wrong picture of God. What do you have on your paintbrush as you paint your God-picture?! As Ellen White says: "our whole spiritual life will be molded by our conception of God's character." (RH, Apr.5, 1887).

As Adventists we may each agree with all our church teachings and still be completely wrong about God! We may have the right understanding about the Sabbath, the Second Coming, the State of the Dead, Tithe, Healthy Living and all the rest—but still not know the true God.

Think for a moment about the religious leaders of Jesus' time... Were they Adventists? Yes, waiting for the Messiah to come. Did they believe in the Sabbath? - Yes, 100%. What about the Sanctuary, did they believe in that? - Yes, they even practiced it! And the Bible idea of Tithe? - Yes down to the herbs in the garden! What about healthy living? - Yes again - no unclean meats eaten there. And did they worship God? - Yes, no question. So they were very much like us. And what did they do? Crucified the Lord of glory, because they did not *know* him, didn't understand what God is really like: "Multitudes have been led to cherish an erroneous conception of God, as the Jews, misled by the errors and traditions of their time, had a false conception of Christ. Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." 5T710. If they had really known God, they would have recognized Christ as God and not have killed him.

Could it be that we could do the same? God forbid! But unless we know God and understand his character, we will just as faithfully misrepresent God as did the Jews, and crucify him afresh. Our role is to make sure we speak well of God, and rightly reveal Him to the world.

## 12. Lord of Our Service

**Biblical material:** John 13:1-15, Rom. 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:28–13:3, Luke 10:38-42.

### Quotes:

- God is not greater if you reverence him, but you are greater if you serve him. *Augustine*
- There is nothing small in the service of God. *Francois de Sales*
- Divine work must be divinely initiated. *Watchman Nee*
- A master gives his servant work to do, but he cannot give him strength to work; but God, as he cuts us out work, so he gives us strength. *Thomas Watson*

### Introductory questions

How does the idea of serving work in today's world? Does not the idea of "being in service" bring back memories of "Upstairs Downstairs" and the class divisions of society? How can the positive idea of service be better understood? What are the dangers of operating as a servant? What is the service that God most wants?

### Discussion ideas

Many Bible texts refer to the idea of service. Sometimes this is in the sense of slavery, other times the service is rendered cheerfully and voluntarily. What is the kind of service that we should be speak of, then? For if God wanted unquestioning obedience, then he did not have to make us with freedom of choice. Or is he a dictator that says he allows us choice, and then forces us to choose one way?

All too often as we think of serving God the concept is one of the master/servant relationship. In this there is little thought from the servant's perspective—in fact thinking is not required! But as we saw in the lesson on worship, what God most wants is our considered and careful thought, thought that leads us to agree with God and love him all the more because he makes such good sense.

In what ways can we end up with "misguided service" (Thursday's lesson)? The lesson also mentions that we should not see doing good works such as handing out evangelistic flyers or "throwing some money in a collection plate" as being enough. So how do we evaluate our "service"? On what is it really based?

Philanthropy is often thought of in terms of service—the willing giving of means and resources to help worthy causes. Maybe this is a better model for Christian service—not the giving up of the mind, but the even greater exercise of thought that recognizes our tremendous responsibilities to witness well of our loving Lord.

The scripture texts for this week remind us that we work together as part of the body of Christ. For this reason service needs to be harmonious, mutually supportive—just as each part of the body works in harmony with the other parts.

What about Martha? Wasn't she doing just the right thing—in working hard to meet the practical demands of life? In Jesus' response we see that an over-focus on service can also become a problem. We need to keep this in balance, meeting our own physical and spiritual needs just as we work for others around us.

How do you react to Ellen White's statement that "service that springs from an appreciation of His character"? How can we make this a practical reality?

## Ellen White Comments

Though created innocent and holy, our first parents were not placed beyond the possibility of wrong-doing. God might have created them without the power to transgress His requirements, but in that case there could have been no development of character; their service would not have been voluntary, but forced. Therefore He gave them the power of choice--the power to yield or to withhold obedience. {Ed 23}

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love--homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service. {GC 493}

The history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God's unchanging love.... The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love,--service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience.... {SD 18}

## Extra Material

I'm writing this section waiting for Ana to finish some tests at the hospital. Sitting across from me is a teenage girl with her mother. The girl is being "forced" to drink some fluid in preparation for the radiology procedure she is about to undergo. She is complaining bitterly to her mother about the "disgusting" taste of the preparation, and is taking forever to get it down. "I feel worse than when I got here," she wails. "I don't want any more of this garbage."

Her mother soothes, cajoles, pleads, encourages, even demands that her daughter drinks it. "It's for your own good," she adds.

"You don't love me or you wouldn't make me drink this stuff," the girl declares. "What kind of mother are you?"

Sometimes we see our service for God in the same way—as bitter medicine that's necessary for our own good. We may even resent our heavenly Father for "forcing" us to do this. But we do it because we're told to, and that's all that matters, right?

Wrong! If we give service in a spirit of sullen acquiescence then what good does it do?

I remember inviting members to visit neighbors and to share the good news. But I pleaded that if they did not really want to go, then they should not go! For what good is an unenthusiastic witness? Even those who do feel positively can do more harm than good!

So what is the heart of our speaking for God? If we truly do want to say good things, and know the God we love, what is the most important thing we have to say? Some say: "Third angel's message" - maybe. But surely not the terrifying disaster picture presented there - we can't *scare* people into loving God! Some say: "The second coming." Very important, but if you don't know the Jesus that's coming, how can you long for his return? Some say: "The church. We must present ourselves as caring people." But if we're only attracting attention to ourselves, what will people see?! We're not trying to convince people about a system of creeds to which you say yes. We're not trying to make people healthy so that they will join our organization. We're not trying to so scare and frighten people that become part of the "remnant church".

No. The heart of the message is the gospel. The good news. And it's good news about **GOD**. So let us take another look at what we're saying...

### 13. King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

**Biblical material:** John 14:1-3, Acts 1:9-11, Matthew 24:23-51, 7:21-29; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 20:7-9.

#### Quotes:

- The Lord who vacated his tomb has not vacated his throne. *G. R. Beasley-Murray*
- Jesus cannot be our Saviour unless he is first our Lord. *Hugh C. Barr*
- To present Christ's lordship as an option leaves it squarely in the category of stereo equipment for a new car. *Dallas Willard*
- There's not a thumb's breadth of this universe about which Jesus Christ does not say, 'It is mine.' *Abraham Kuyper*

#### Introductory questions

Why is it important to acknowledge God as "King of kings and Lord of lords"? How does this fit into the issues in the great controversy? How do we see eternity in the presence of God? Why is the future important to us? How does God treat those who disagree with him? How is the great controversy ended, and what are the implications?

#### Discussion ideas

The reassurance that God is in control is one we all cling to. Eventually, ultimately, finally, all will be resolved for good. But for the moment the conflict continues, the controversy is not ended. We look for and long for the ultimate End, but the End is not yet.

The real assurance is however that the return is of the God we know, the person Jesus. As the angels told the disciples, it is "this same Jesus"! So it is not as if the one returning is unknown, or that his character will surprise us...

Nor is this about us alone, as we so often must remind ourselves. The return of Jesus initiates the final dramas in the great controversy, as events come to a head and the conflict of the ages is ultimately resolved. So this should interest us more than for reasons of self-interest!

But even here there are questions. What about Revelation 20 and the unrelenting torment? How do we present this "good news"? What of those who call for the mountains and rocks to fall on them—is this the time for the Hallelujah Chorus?

Also note this: "If we love and serve Jesus even amid the toil, pain, sin, and corruption on earth now, then how much more so in the new heaven and a new earth? Our service to Jesus as Lord there will just be the continuation of our service to Him here but without the cumbrousness of sin, disease, ignorance, and the devil. That's the victory Jesus won for us." Thursday's lesson. Does this mean we have to stay in our servant relationship for all eternity? Much of the way we answer will depend on how we think of God, and what he requires from us...

Take another look at Philippians 2. What is the reason for God's exaltation of Jesus? Because of his humility! The reason we can have total confidence in God is because he is not power-hungry, position-loving, self-pleasing. All he does is for the best, not of himself, but of others. So as we think of an eternity in God's presence, we can be sure that God will never change his loving, self-giving character, always looking for the best for his created children.

And that's an eternity I can look forward to!

## Ellen White Comments

One day I listened to a conversation between my mother and a sister, in reference to a discourse which they had recently heard, to the effect that the soul had not natural immortality. Some of the minister's proof texts were repeated. Among them I remember these impressed me very forcibly: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Ezekiel 18:4. "The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything." Ecclesiastes 9:5. "Which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality." 1 Timothy 6:15, 16. "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life." Romans 2:7.

"Why," said my mother, after quoting the foregoing passage, "should they seek for what they already have?"s

I listened to these new ideas with an intense and painful interest. When alone with my mother, I inquired if she really believed that the soul was not immortal. Her reply was, that she feared we had been in error on that subject, as well as upon some others.

"But, mother," said I, "do you really believe that the soul sleeps in the grave until the resurrection? Do you think that the Christian, when he dies, does not go immediately to heaven, nor the sinner to hell?"

She answered: "The Bible gives us no proof that there is an eternally burning hell. If there is such a place, it should be mentioned in the Sacred Book."

"Why, mother!" cried I, in astonishment, "this is strange talk for you! If you believe this strange theory, do not let anyone know of it; for I fear that sinners would gather security from this belief, and never desire to seek the Lord."

"If this is sound Bible truth," she replied, "instead of preventing the salvation of sinners, it will be the means of winning them to Christ. If the love of God will not induce the rebel to yield, the terrors of an eternal hell will not drive him to repentance. Besides, it does not seem a proper way to win souls to Jesus by appealing to one of the lowest attributes of the mind,--abject fear. The love of Jesus attracts; it will subdue the hardest heart." {CET 39-40}

## Extra material

"Just as the resurrection faith is hope's foundation, so Christ's second coming defines hope's horizon. Without the expectation of Christ's second coming there is no Christian hope." (Juergen Moltmann, Experiences of God, p.33). *Without such an expectation there is no Christian hope!* Hope is founded on Christ's resurrection, and is realised by Christ's return. Both are incomplete without each other--they are twin aspects of God's saving work. So how can the second advent be ignored or disregarded?!

Another image: "Faith in Jesus Christ without the expectation of His Parousia [second coming] is a voucher that is not redeemed, a promise that is not seriously meant. A Christian faith without expectation of the Parousia is like a ladder which leads nowhere but ends in the void." (Emil Brunner, Eternal Hope, 138-9.) A ladder going nowhere--that's faith without the second advent! Who wants to climb up and find that it ends in nothingness? The second advent is the last rung of God's ladder by which He brings us back to Himself.

One last image: "God leads us forward, not back. The Christian life means looking forward to the coming of Christ, like a runner straining for the finishing tape." (Stephen Travis, The Jesus Hope, p.93). Is that our view, our experience? Straining like runners for the tape at the end of the race? And have we understood that God is *always* leading us forward, not back?