

Jesus Mingled With People



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 1:22, 23; John 1:14; Luke 15:3–24; Matt. 9:10–13; Ps. 51:17; 1 John 2:16; Phil. 2:13–15.*

Memory Text: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’ ” (*Luke 15:1, 2, NIV*).

A deacon in a local church drove a van that took the youth to an old-age home to hold a worship service every month. In the first week, while the youth were leading out, an old man in a wheelchair grabbed the deacon's hand and held it during the service. This happened month after month. One time, when the youth group came, the man in the wheelchair was not there. The staff said that he would not likely live through the night. The deacon went to his room, and he was lying there, obviously unconscious. Taking the old man's hand, the deacon prayed that the Lord would grant him eternal life. The seemingly unconscious man squeezed the deacon's hand tightly, and the deacon knew that his prayer had been heard. With tears in his eyes, he stumbled out of the room, bumping into a woman who said, “I'm his daughter. He's been waiting for you. My father said, ‘Once a month Jesus comes and holds my hand. And I don't want to die until I have a chance to hold the hand of Jesus one more time.’” —Adapted from *The Least of These*, a video produced by Old Fashioned Pictures (2004). Used by permission.

Christianity is about becoming “Jesus” for somebody. The next several lessons will focus on aspects of Jesus' ministry method and how His church can live out His ministry.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 6.

Christ’s Method Alone

Ellen G. White, in an often-quoted paragraph, summarizes what Jesus did in order to reach out and bring the people to salvation. (*See also Matt. 9:35, 36.*)

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Let’s analyze this a bit.

1. Jesus mingled with people as One who desired their good. (He opened networks.)
2. Jesus sympathized with people. (He formed attachments.)
3. Jesus ministered to their needs. (This also formed attachments.)
4. When He combined the first, second, and third elements, He won people’s confidence.
5. “Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’ ” (to become disciples).

What we see here is a wholistic model of the gospel. This ministry method will guide us in proclaiming the gospel more fully. Jesus did not separate the social aspects (numbers 1–4) from giving the invitation to follow Him (number 5), and neither should we. All of the steps working together will give “*true* success.” This lesson will focus on the first step of Jesus’ method. Lessons 7–11 will focus on the others.

What do the following verses say about God the Son mingling with us?

Matt. 1:22, 23; John 1:14.

We are all deeply hurt and damaged by sin. But everything that has gone wrong in the world because of sin is addressed by God’s reconciliation with humanity through Jesus’ wholistic incarnational ministry. He mingled with and desired the good of the whole person and the whole human race, even ministering to those who in that culture were deemed “the worst.”

Dwell on this amazing truth that the One who made all created things (see John 1:3), Jesus, took upon Himself human flesh and in the flesh mingled with and ministered to fallen humanity as He did. How should this amazing truth, so full of hope, impact how we mingle with and minister to others?

Lost and Found

Jesus tells three parables in Luke 15, in direct response to the accusation of the Pharisees and teachers of the law that Jesus “welcomes sinners and eats with them” (*Luke 15:2, NIV*).

Read the following passages and note the essence of Jesus’ answer to these accusations.

Luke 15:3–7 _____

Luke 15:8–10 _____

Luke 15:11–24 _____

Each parable begins with something lost and ends with a celebration, an expression of God’s love for us and His profound interest in our salvation.

A pastor was following up a Voice of Prophecy interest and discovered that the whole family was interested in Bible studies, except one. The mother, father, and younger daughter had accepted Christ and were eager to receive the pastor in their home on a regular basis. The older son had rebelled against Christianity and wanted nothing to do with it. Every evening that the pastor visited, the young man left the room and would not participate in the lesson studies. After six weeks of cordial and productive Bible study, the young pastor began to challenge the three who were studying with him to consider baptism. Each had his or her own reason why he or she should wait a few months before deciding. Unexpectedly, the young man entered the dining room where the study was in session and announced that he wanted to be baptized as soon as the pastor felt he was ready. He had been sitting in his room following along in a Bible he had purchased at a used bookstore after the first lesson, and all along was growing in conviction that he needed to make a public confession of his faith. Two weeks later the young man was baptized, and one month after that, the rest of the family took their stand as well. Considering what we just read in the parables, we can imagine that there was joy in heaven over these decisions.

Jesus purposely placed Himself in contact with such people as the Samaritan woman at the well, a Roman centurion, a “sinful” woman who poured a year’s salary’s worth of nard on His feet, and countless unrecorded individuals “unworthy” of those who considered themselves too holy to be in their presence.

Have you ever avoided witnessing to a person who would likely not fit well in your church? What would it take for you and your church to find sufficient grace to embrace those “sinners”?

Eating With Sinners

Read Matthew 9:10–13. What crucial message should we as individuals take away from Jesus’ response to His critics? *Read Hos. 6:6.*

Jesus is reclining at the dinner table, where He is fellowshiping and eating with what this society would deem “undesirables.”

What kind of people does your culture deem “undesirables”?

Interrupted by the Pharisees’ question of the appropriateness of Jesus’ mingling with such despicable people, Jesus challenges them to learn the meaning of mercy in contrast to sacrifice. “ ‘But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance’ ” (*Matt. 9:13, NKJV*). How sad that Jesus has to tell religious leaders to learn one of the most crucial truths of their own faith.

Here again, we are seeing the same problem that we saw occurring in Old Testament times, that of religious forms and ceremonies becoming more important in the minds of people than the question of how they treated others. How interesting that He quoted the Old Testament here (*Hos. 6:6*) to make His point.

“Thousands are making the same mistake as did the Pharisees whom Christ reproved at Matthew’s feast. Rather than give up some cherished idea, or discard some idol of opinion, many refuse the truth which comes down from the Father of light. They trust in self, and depend upon their own wisdom, and do not realize their spiritual poverty. . . .

“ . . . Fasting or prayer that is actuated by a self-justifying spirit is an abomination in the sight of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 280.

It is easy to judge the actions of others by using our own preferences as the standard. We must learn to humbly put self aside and allow the Holy Spirit to translate mercy into conviction.

What does Psalm 51:17 say to us all? How should the knowledge of our own sinfulness help us to understand better the meaning of this text?

Mingling Wisely

A speaker asked a group to tell how many “non-Adventist friends” they had. One man in the back of the room stood up and triumphantly proclaimed, “I’m proud to say none!” That man might have meant well, but his words said a lot about what kind of light to the world he was.

As we saw already, Matthew 5:13 says we are the salt of the earth, but this salt can lose its savor. A merchant in Sidon had stored much salt in sheds with a bare earth floor. Because the salt was in direct contact with the earth, it lost its savor. This salt was thrown out and used to pave roads. In the same way, we need to be careful as we mingle with the world: Are we letting the world rob us of our unique savor? Are our values the same as the world’s?

What can we learn from these stories about how not to mingle with the world? *Gen. 13:5–13, 19:12–26, Num. 25:1–3; see also 1 John 2:16.*

These biblical examples illustrate the need for caution in mingling with people who live by the worldly values listed in 1 John 2:16. We fool ourselves if we think that we must not use caution or that there’s no danger of getting caught up in the fallen principles of the world. At the same time, what good are we going to be to others if we hide ourselves from others in order not to be negatively impacted by their ways?

Note this wise and balanced counsel: “Now, shall professed Christians refuse to associate with the unconverted, and seek to have no communication with them? No, they are to be with them, in the world and not of the world, but not to partake of their ways, not to be impressed by them, not to have a heart open to their customs and practices. Their associations are to be for the purpose of drawing others to Christ.”
—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 231.

How many non-Adventist friends do you have? What is the nature of your relationship? Who is influencing whom more, you them or they you?

In the Midst of a Crooked Generation

No question, the world needs what we have been given in Christ. It's nothing in us, ourselves, that makes what we have so important. Rather, it is only by virtue of what we have received from Christ that gives us our imperative to reach others. And it's precisely because we have been given so much that we are called to reach out to those who don't have it. " 'Freely you have received, freely give' " (*Matt. 10:8, NKJV*).

Read **Philippians 2:13–15.** **What are we being told here, and how does it fit in with our calling to reach out to others without falling away ourselves?**

We have to be careful about so seeking to protect ourselves from the world that we never come in contact with the souls in it. It's very easy to stay in our own spiritual and theological comfort zone and to become spiritual introverts. Such introversion can turn into self-centered religion. How often do local churches, for instance, spend more energy battling over worship styles or doctrine than they spend in outreach to a dying world?

Robert Linthicum, in his book *Empowering the Poor* (pp. 21–30), describes three kinds of churches.

First, the church *in* the city (community) has virtually no contact with the community. The bulk of the church's emphasis is serving its members' needs.

Then, there is the church *to* the city (community). This church knows that it must get involved in ministry to the community. It guesses what the community needs without consulting the community it serves. Then it presents programs *to* the community. Its ministry risks being irrelevant, with no community ownership.

Last, Linthicum speaks of the church *with* the city (community). This church does a demographic analysis to understand those whom it serves. Members mingle *with* leaders and residents of the community, asking them what their real needs are. Their service to the community is more likely to be relevant and well-received because the community has already given input and trusts the process. This church joins the community in their struggle to decide what kind of community they want and is a partner with the community toward realizing that goal. Such a church gets involved with community organizations and may help the community to add lacking services, if needed. There is a mutual ownership and buy-in of this partnership to meet real needs.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pp. 17–28, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Levi-Matthew,” pp. 272–280, in *The Desire of Ages*.

The church’s mission is to the world, not only unto itself. It was organized for service to others. A church of another faith community has a sign at the end of the driveway, just before the driveway enters the road into the community in front of the church. The sign says: “Servant’s Entrance.” That says it all, doesn’t it?

Jesus was a great mingler, and Ellen White indicates that God’s church must be today. The members are salt and must permeate the community.

“There is no call here to hibernate in the wilderness evangelizing jack rabbits. Here is an awesome invitation given by the prophet of the Lord to mingle, like Jesus, with the unlovely, the poor, and the lost. Jesus was friends with sinners. He attended their parties—met them where they were. Jesus never compromised His faith, but He loved to go where there were sinners. The people most comfortable around Jesus were sinners, while the ones most uncomfortable were the so-called saints. But Jesus didn’t pay attention to that, because He had His priorities straight. He came to save sinners. That was His mission, and it should be our mission, even if we make some saints upset. . . .

“For too long Adventists have isolated themselves in safe havens and ghettos, as if the rest of the world did not exist. That time has ended. We cannot, we dare not, live in apostasy any longer. It is time to enter the community as individuals and as a church.”—Russell Burrill, *How to Grow an Adventist Church* (Fallbrook, Calif.: Hart Books, 2009), p. 50.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the idea expressed above that by isolating ourselves we are “in apostasy.” Do you think that’s too strong, or is the point valid? If so, what biblical justification can you find to back up your answer?
- 2 Though we need to mingle in order to minister, why is the support from, and accountability to, the church family an important factor that we mustn’t neglect? How can we as a church body help one another as we seek to minister to the world but not get pulled into it?
- 3 Discuss this idea of churches spending more energy bickering over internal issues than they spend on outreach. How can we avoid this deadly trap?