

How Shall We Wait?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 24:35–25:46, 2 Peter 3, James 2:14–26, John 4:35–38, 1 Cor. 3:6–8, Rev. 21:1–4.*

Memory Text: “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (*Romans 12:11–13, NIV*).

For several years preceding the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the Seventh-day Adventist churches in San Francisco and Oakland, California, were buzzing. Members were involved in visiting the sick and destitute. They found homes for orphans and work for the unemployed. They nursed the sick and taught the Bible from house to house. Members distributed Christian literature and gave classes on healthful living. The churches also conducted a school for the children in the basement of the Laguna Street meetinghouse. A workingmen’s home and medical mission were maintained. They had a health-food store along with a vegetarian café. The members had started ship mission work at the local port, and their ministers conducted meetings in large halls in the city from time to time.

Ellen G. White had called these churches the two “beehives” and was thrilled by their work (*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 5, 1900). What powerful examples of what we should and could be doing now as we await the Second Coming. Our Lord is coming back; that we know. The crucial issue for us is: What are we doing while we wait?

On that answer hangs the destiny of souls.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 24.

While We Wait for Jesus

The disciples had just been admiring the glorious scene as the sun's rays glistened off the temple. Jesus, wanting to focus their attention on the realities facing the Christian church in the near future and the end of time, cryptically gave them a dose of reality by saying: "Do you see all these things? . . . Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (*Matt. 24:2, NIV*). Surprised by His comment, the disciples asked, "When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (*Matt. 24:3, NIV*). In Matthew 24:4–31, Jesus then tells them the things to expect to see unfold in the world before He returns.

In revealing the signs, Jesus warns, "But the end is still to come" (*Matt. 24:6, NIV*), and that "all these are the beginning of birth pains" (*Matt. 24:8, NIV*). The direct answer to the disciples' question comes in verse 14. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (*Matt. 24:14, NIV*).

In this discourse, the first 35 verses in Matthew 24 motivate us to take the signs seriously, but Jesus also tells us *how we are to wait* for "the end of the age" (*Matt. 24:3, NIV*). In other words, we just don't sit there and wait for Him to come as we would sit at a bus stop and wait for the bus. No, we are given plenty to do as we wait for the Lord's second advent.

Read Matthew 24:36–25:46. Each one of these parables talks about what God's people should be doing as they await the second coming of Jesus. Summarize the essence of what the Lord is telling us here. Then we need to ask ourselves, both individually and as a church: *How well are we following the Lord's instructions for us in each of these parables?*

Jesus here begins to exhort His disciples about the way His true followers will wait for Him to come again. During this period Jesus' disciples will always be ready. They will show love, care, and respect to each other while waiting; they will stay alert, prepare ahead, and be responsible for their own spiritual condition. They will multiply the resources that God has placed in their hands, invest talents and money in God's cause, respect the true character of their loving God, and care for "the least of these."

Revival and Reformation While We Wait

Read 2 Peter 3. Summarize the teachings in this chapter that pertain to revival and reformation. How do these verses fit in with the topic we have been studying all quarter?

God's desire is that "everyone" will "come to repentance" (*2 Pet. 3:9, NIV*). Though we cannot do the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to repentance, we are called to reach them with the message of salvation, which, if accepted, will lead to repentance.

We, too, as church members, need to be in an attitude of repentance. Repentance is part of the process of revival and reformation. Revival means to come back to life, to be renewed, restored. Reformation means to be reshaped, reformed—to be a new creation (*2 Cor. 5:17*). "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121.

The "how should we wait" passages in yesterday's study illustrate conditions and outcomes of revival and reformation. For example, all 10 virgins needed to be revived, awakened out of sleep (*Matt. 25:1–13*). The foolish virgins needed to increase their capacity for the Holy Spirit in their lives. When we humble ourselves, die to self, unselfishly pray, study God's Word, and lovingly share it with others in word and loving deeds, we increase our capacity for an infilling of the Holy Spirit in latter rain power. However, it is possible to study the Bible for hours and still be a selfish person. We could pray for revival and the latter rain but selfishly want it only for ourselves. *Revival always leads to unselfish concern for others*. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be reformed into passionate mission- and service-centered disciples.

We need revival and reformation in our prayers, in Bible study, and in our focus on asking for the Holy Spirit in latter rain abundance. But as a church we also need revival and reformation in our attitudes and methods. We need revival and reformation in our attitude and actions toward "the least of these." All this has been the focus of this quarter's lessons.

How can we guard ourselves against complacency in regard to the second coming of Jesus? That is, as the years go by, how can we always keep before ourselves the reality and urgency of the Lord's return?

The Mission of the Church While We Wait

Read James 2:14–26. In what ways do these verses encapsulate who we are and why we are here?

In Sunday’s study, the disciples start out pointing to the beauty of the temple buildings. Jesus points their attention to the condition of the church within and its mission to an ending world. The fact is that the church exists because there is a mission, and not vice versa.

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as expressed in the General Conference *Working Policy* (A 05) is “to make disciples of all people, communicating the everlasting gospel [gospel of the kingdom (*Matthew 24:14*)] in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and unite with His remnant church, discipling them to serve Him as Lord, and preparing them for His soon return.” Preaching, teaching, and healing are the suggested methods to pursue this mission. Under “Healing” the *Working Policy* says: “Affirming the biblical principles of the well-being of the whole person, we make the preservation of health and the healing of the sick a priority and through our ministry to the poor and oppressed, cooperate with the Creator in His compassionate work of restoration.”

This quarter began with the concept that Jesus wants to restore His image in humanity and empower us as His followers to be instruments of wholistic restoration in our communities. “The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ. A great work of reform is demanded, and it is only through the grace of Christ that the work of restoration, physical, mental, and spiritual, can be accomplished.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

After hearing a seminar that presented the ministry of Jesus as a model and mission for His end-time church, a church member made this statement: “In our part of the world, we are not very open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. What we have heard this week about following the ministry method of Jesus actually is not new. It’s an old idea. We just forgot it.”

“Faith without works is dead.” How have you discovered the reality of how closely linked faith and works are? In what ways do works increase your faith?

Preparing for the Final Harvest While We Wait

Jesus used farming language in His teaching about the kingdom, as pointed out in lesson 5. As we have seen, farming is not merely an event; it is a patient *process*! It is a regularly repeated cycle with different stages and different jobs for different people at different times. We need to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the providences of God in regard to how we can be used by the Lord in the process of preparing the ground, planting seeds, and reaping the harvest.

Read John 4:35–38. What kind of imagery is being used there, and what is the message to us in regard to how we should work for others?

The fact is, we don't know people's hearts. We don't know how the Holy Spirit has been working in their lives. We might look at various people and think that they have a long way to go before being ready to be harvested when, in reality, all they need is someone to urge them to make a commitment to Jesus. There is a battle for the heart and mind of every human being, and God is calling us to help people choose Him.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:6–8. What is the message to us here in the context of outreach?

In his own way, Paul is saying here what Jesus said in the previous example. The work of outreach is like the work of a farmer. We might not all be doing the same tasks, but that work is still a crucial part of the process of reaching out and winning souls. And though we are to be used by God in various capacities, in the end it is God alone who can bring about the conversion of a soul.

How can we learn to be thankful and humbled by whatever role God has given us in the process of ministering to others? Why is it truly a privilege?

The Wait Is Over

Many years ago, English author Charles Dickens wrote a book called *A Tale of Two Cities*. Those two cities were London and Paris. In a sense, it could be said that the Bible is also a tale of two cities. In this case, the two cities are Babylon and Jerusalem.

In Revelation 14:8 and Revelation 18, the apostle John describes Babylon. She has been the home of demons and the haunt of evil spirits. She has caused every nation to commit spiritual adultery. Her doom has been pronounced, and she has been declared “fallen.” This city, a symbol of evil and apostasy and rebellion against God, will one day be defeated and destroyed.

Read Revelation 21:1–4. How does the New Jerusalem contrast with Babylon?

The second city is the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, described in Revelation 21 and 22. This city houses those who have chosen the Bridegroom and rejected the selfishness and spiritual adulteries of Satan and his followers. By God’s grace, the redeemed have obeyed His commandments and reflected the faith of Jesus (*Rev. 14:12*). Their patient endurance and their eagerness to embrace the ministry of Jesus provided a taste of the kingdom of heaven while on earth. They have been saved through faith in Jesus; His righteousness alone made them worthy of heaven. Their care for “the least of these” (*Matt. 25:40*) has been the outward manifestation of that saving faith.

By the blood of the Lamb (*Revelation 5*), the church’s role in compassionate restoration has changed to jubilant celebration (*see Rev. 5:13, 14*). In that happy Holy City, “ ‘God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’ ” (*Rev. 21:4, NKJV*). True peace has been restored. The full restoration of the image of God, mentally, spiritually, and physically, has taken place. The great controversy is over, and from “the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Read Revelation 22:21. In what way does that verse, the last one in the Bible, capture the essence of all that we believe?

Further Thought: Read Matthew 5:16; Colossians 3:17; Hebrews 13:15, 16. Read Ellen G. White, “On the Mount of Olives,” pp. 627–636, and reread “The Least of These My Brethren,” pp. 637–641, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Jesus told us what the signs of the end would be before He returned, and they are not pretty. Wars, rumors of wars, pestilence, et cetera. If people often use the excuse of evil to reject God, they certainly have plenty of excuses now, and they will have more excuses as we get nearer to the end. Thus, it becomes even more crucial for God’s people, those who claim to be His followers, to reflect His character to the world and to help people get a better view of what God is like. “If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 189. What a simple yet powerful statement in regard to outreach and ministry to others. While we wait for Jesus’ second coming, He expects members of His church to preach and live the whole gospel; to invest ourselves and our resources in His work; to love, respect, and care for people; and to open our lives for the Holy Spirit in His fullness. That’s a witness that all the arguments in the world can’t nullify.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, talk about the difference between what it would be like living in “Babylon” as opposed to living in “Jerusalem.” What would be the major differences between the two cities? That is, where is the major difference to be found—in what the places look like or in who lives in them?
- 2 The great question for Christians is not “Do works have a role in the Christian faith?” Of course they do. Instead, the question is “If works cannot save us, then what is their role in the Christian faith?” How do we answer that question, especially in the context of reaching out and ministering to others in need?
- 3 How are we waiting for Jesus to return? That is, what are we doing in our lives that reveals the reality of our belief in His return? Why should we be living differently from those who don’t believe in the Second Coming?