

The Last Days and God's Saving Plan



SABBATH—APRIL 21

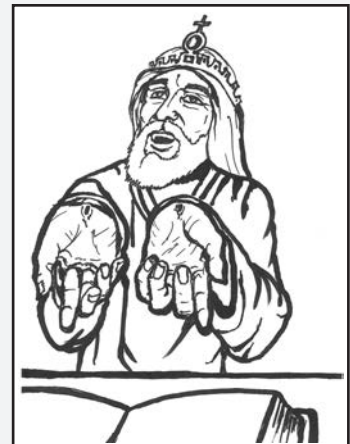
READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: John 14:9; Zephaniah 3:17; John 1:1–3; Romans 8:38, 39; Psalm 91:15, 16.

MEMORY VERSE: “Here is what love is. It is not that we loved God. It is that he loved us and sent his Son to give his life to pay for our sins” (1 John 4:10, NIV).

WHAT IS the most important difference between the Christian religion and non-Christian religions? Non-Christian religions have a lot to say about the teachings of the leaders who started their religions. But non-Christian religions do not have a lot to say about the things that their leaders *have done for them*. Why not? Because nothing these leaders did can save their followers. The most these leaders can do is teach their followers to “save” themselves.

But Christianity is different. As Christians, we talk about Jesus' teachings. But we also talk about the things Jesus did to save us. What did Jesus do? He became a human (Romans 8:3). He died on the cross (Romans 5:8). He woke up from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). He works right now in heaven to get us ready to live with Him (Hebrews 7:25). These things alone save us. We are not saved by anything we do ourselves. “What would happen if you told God's angels that part of the reason why humans will be saved is because of everything that is good, holy, and lovely in humans? Then the angels would throw that idea out because it is disloyal to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, page 24; adapted.

The truth that Jesus alone saves us is a very important truth for us in these last days.



Jesus works right now in heaven to get us ready to live with Him (Hebrews 7:25).

GOD OUR FATHER'S LOVE FOR US (1 John 4:8)

Not too long before Jesus died on the cross, Jesus spoke with His closest followers. Jesus explained to them that people come to the Father only by believing in Jesus. Then one of Jesus' followers, Philip, said, " 'Lord, show us the Father. That is all we need' " (John 14:8, ERV).

How does Jesus answer Philip in John 14:9? What does Jesus' answer teach us about our Father in heaven? How does Philip's question show us his false ideas about God? What were they? How does Jesus' answer show us these ideas are false?

Some people say that the Old Testament shows us that God is a mean Judge. They also say that the New Testament shows us that God is full of mercy and very forgiving. These people say that the Bible shows us two very different pictures of God. But this thinking is false. The God in the Old Testament is the same God in the New Testament. God has the same mercy and forgiveness in the Old Testament that He has in the New Testament.

One reason Jesus came to this earth was to show people the truth about God the Father. But by the time Jesus came to this earth, wrong ideas about God the Father filled the minds of people everywhere who did not believe in God. Sadly, God's chosen people believed wrong things about Him too. "The earth was a dark place because people believed wrong ideas about God. Jesus came to bring the truth to this earth. He came to bring the people on this earth back to God. Jesus came to break Satan's powerful lies."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 22; adapted. These were some of the reasons that Jesus came to this earth.

God does not change. If we understood exactly why things happened as they did in the Old Testament, we would see God is just as forgiving and full of mercy in the Old Testament as He is in the New Testament. "God is love" (1 John 4:8, NLV). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8, NLV).

Remember, too, that it was the God of the Old Testament who hung on the cross. This God is not quick to get angry. God's love never fails us (Psalm 147:11). God wants to give His people success and hope (Jeremiah 29:11). He is loyal, kind, and full of love (Exodus 34:6, 7). God is all these things and more.



God's love never fails us.

JESUS' LOVE FOR US (John 1:1–3)

Sin separated humans from God. The separation between humans and God was very wide, deep, and dangerous. That separation between God and humans needed to end. Until that happened, humans faced everlasting ruin. It took something amazing to solve the sin problem and to join sinners again with a holy God. It took Someone who was everlasting and who was God Himself to solve the problem. That Someone was Jesus. To solve the sin problem, Jesus became a Human Being and gave His life to pay for our sins.

Read John 1:1–3, 14 and Philippians 2:5–8. What do these verses teach us about Jesus?

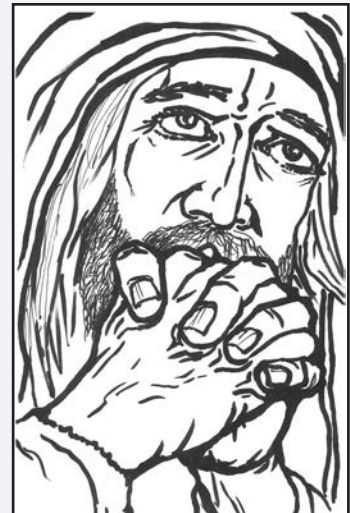
Jesus is everlasting. He does not depend on anyone or anything for His life. He does not only seem to be God on the outside. Jesus *is* God Himself. Jesus continued to be God when He became a Human. He became a Human so that He could obey the law in human flesh. He became human so that He could die as our Substitute. He died for everyone who broke the law. That means He died for everyone who ever lived (Romans 3:23).

Jesus became human. He had no special power that other humans did not have. He obeyed God's law. He did not use His power as God to obey. Instead, Jesus trusted in, and depended on, the same power from God that every person can trust in.

Jesus was fully God and fully human. Jesus "holds everything together with his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3, ICB). But this same God also was born as a "Baby lying in a place where cattle are fed" (Luke 2:16, NLV). Jesus "was there before anything was made. And all things continue because of him" (Colossians 1:17, ERV). But this same God also lived as a human Child, who "grew strong in mind and body" (Luke 2:52, NLV). This God Jesus "made all things" (John 1:3, NLV). But this same God also was " 'killed and nailed to a cross' " (Acts 5:30, NLV).

All these things show Jesus' love for us. Jesus' love shows to us the Father's love for us. No wonder we have so many reasons to be filled with joy and to feel thankful!

How do the things we studied today give us powerful reasons to trust Paul's words to us in Romans 8:38, 39?



Jesus trusted in, and depended on, the same power from God that every person can trust in.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S LOVE FOR US (Luke 12:12)

Many people do not understand the Holy Spirit. People misunderstand the Holy Spirit almost as much as they misunderstand God our Father. Some Bible thinkers believe that the Holy Spirit is not a Person. Instead, these thinkers believe the Spirit is only the love between the Father and the Son. This thinking makes the Spirit nothing more than a feeling between God and Jesus, and not God Himself.

But the Bible proves that the Holy Spirit is a Person. Christians are baptized in the Spirit's name along with the Father's and the Son's names (Matthew 28:19). The Holy Spirit gives Jesus glory and honor (John 16:14). The Holy Spirit tells people that sin is wrong (John 16:8). We can make the Holy Spirit feel sad about the way we live our lives (Ephesians 4:30). The Holy Spirit comforts us (John 14:16). He is a Helper, and He advises us (John 14:16). He is a Teacher (Luke 12:12). He "speaks to God for us" (Romans 8:26, ERV). The Holy Spirit makes us holy (1 Peter 1:2). Jesus said the Holy Spirit leads people into all truth (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit is God as much as the Father and Son are. Together, the Father, the Son, and Spirit are One God.

Everything the Holy Spirit does shows us God's love. What are some things the Spirit does? Read Luke 12:12; John 16:8–13; and Acts 13:2 to help answer the question.



What is the biggest proof that the Holy Spirit is God? It is the fact that the Holy Spirit put Jesus as a baby in Mary's womb.

What is the biggest proof that the Holy Spirit is God? It is the fact that the Holy Spirit made Jesus' birth as a Man possible. The Holy Spirit put Jesus as a baby in Mary's womb. The womb is the part of a woman's body where her baby grows until it is ready to be born. Only God could put Jesus in Mary's womb.

The Holy Spirit is working along with the Father and Jesus to save us. "God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit felt deep sorrow for humans. So, the Three-in-One God worked together to save humans from sin."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels [advice] on Health*, page 222; adapted.

God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit love us. They are working hard to save us.

Why should it comfort us to know that God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are hard at work to save us?

WE CAN BE SURE GOD WILL SAVE US
(Psalm 91:15, 16)

Some of us Seventh-day Adventists wonder if we will be saved. We are not sure. We want to know if we have everlasting life. We work hard to be good enough. But in the end, we know deep in our hearts that we fall short of being good enough to be saved. We look inside ourselves. But we see very little there to give us hope in this life.

There is a big difference between Jesus' holy life and our own lives. We read verses in the Bible that say: " 'But the gate that opens the way to true life is narrow [very small]. And the road that leads there is hard to follow. Only a few people find it' " (Matthew 7:14, ERV). Then we may wonder if we are ever going to make it to heaven.

So then, how do we ever get ready for Jesus to come back? Here is the answer: we must be sure right now about being saved. We must feel joy in the truth that Jesus saves us. Then we will be able to face the future without fear. As we have studied so far, God the Father, Jesus His Son, and the Holy Spirit are hard at work to save us. So, we can trust in God to save us. What a precious gift!

Read the verses below. What hope do they give us about why we can trust in God to save us? Why can we feel sure about the things God has done for us and promises to do?

Psalm 91:15, 16 _____

Joel 2:31, 32 _____

John 10:28 _____

Romans 10:9–13 _____

1 John 5:11–13 _____

God tells us, even commands us, to live holy lives. But these lives are possible only because Jesus has saved us. We do not live holy lives to earn the gift of being saved. We must be loyal to God even if obeying Him means that we get killed. But we must always trust in His gift of saving us. This gift is our only hope. God's people will show to everyone on this earth that they are loyal and obedient to God in the last days. Their loyal and obedient lives come only from their trust in Jesus to save them.



“ ‘The gate that opens the way to true life is narrow [very small]. And the road that leads there is hard to follow. Only a few people find it’ ” (Matthew 7:14, ERV).

THE GOOD NEWS THAT CONTINUES FOREVER (Revelation 14:6, 7)

Read Revelation 14:6, 7. What is the “Good News that lasts [continues] forever” (NLV)?

In Revelation 14:6, 7, John describes the Good News as a message that “lasts [continues] forever” (NLV). The fact that the Good News continues forever is more proof that God does not change. A God who does not change has Good News that does not change either. God’s everlasting Good News gives hope to everyone who believes it. The Good News shows us that God’s love for us never changes. This message about God’s love needs to go to every person on this earth.

“Even before the world [earth] was made, God chose us for Himself because of His love. He planned that we should be holy and without blame as He sees us” (Ephesians 1:4, 5, NLV). How does this verse show us the truth that the Good News really does continue forever?



We are saved because of God’s love.

“God chose us for Himself” “even before the world [earth] was made.” Wow! Now that is Good News! Even before God made this earth, God made a plan to save us.

Look at some of the words used in Ephesians 1:4, 5: “chose”; “planned;” and “because of His love” (NLV). All these words point to God’s desire for us to have everlasting life with Him. The fact that God planned to save us long before there ever was an earth is proof that He loves us. His love shows us that our being saved does not come from anything we do. Instead, we are saved because of God’s love. How could our being saved come from anything we did if God already chose for us to be saved before He made us?

How do we show to other people around us that God chose us to be His people and wants them to become His people too? We show it by living lives that are “holy and without blame” before Him. God chose us for that too.

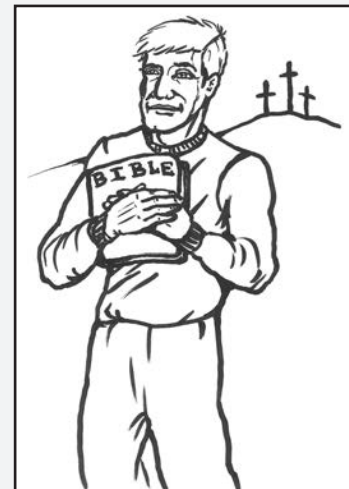
God chose us to share the “Good News” (Revelation 14:6, NLV) with everyone on earth. This message is part of God’s message that must be shared with people everywhere before Jesus comes back. Why must we know and experience how real the Good News is in our own lives before we share it with other people?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: We can trust and believe that we are saved. But we must not think we can somehow ever be good enough to save ourselves. Is it possible for us to have such a false faith? Yes. Jesus warned us about it too. He said, “ ‘Not everyone who calls me Lord will enter God’s kingdom. The only people who will enter are those who do what my Father in heaven wants. On that last Day many will call me Lord. They will say, “Lord, Lord, by the power of your name we spoke for God. And by your name we forced out demons and did many miracles.” Then I will tell those people clearly, “Get away from me, you people who do wrong. I never knew you” ’ ” (Matthew 7:21–23, ERV).

The people that Jesus describes in this verse made two terrible mistakes. First, it is true that they did many good things in the Lord’s name. But they were not following God’s plan. God’s plan is for us to obey His law. Jesus did not say to them, “Go away from me, you who are not perfect.” Instead, Jesus says that these people “ ‘do wrong.’ ” This wording comes from the Greek word “anomia.” It means that these people did not obey the law. Second, do you see that these people put a lot of importance on themselves and the things they did? But their hearts were very far away from Jesus. These people point to their own works to make themselves right with God. But only Jesus’ works save us. When we accept Jesus, God accepts us as if we ourselves lived Jesus’ holy life. Our feeling sure that we are saved comes from this gift. Do you want to feel sure that you are saved? Obey God’s law. Trust only in the things Jesus has done for you. Then you will have all the hope you need.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Martin Luther said: “When I look to myself, I do not know how I can be saved. When I look to Jesus, I do not know how I can be lost.”—Adapted. Why is it a good idea always to remember these words?
- ② God chose us to be saved before He ever made the earth. Why does this truth *not* mean that everyone will be saved? Why will some people not be saved? Will it be because God did not choose these people? Or will it be because of the choices these people made? Explain.
- ③ There is a big war going on between good and evil. How can knowing this fact help us to live on this earth where so many bad things happen?



Trust only in the things Jesus has done for you. Then you will have all the hope you need.