



2023 4Q God's Mission My Mission Lesson 9 Mission to the Powerful

by Tim Jennings

SABBATH

What do you think of the title?

The lesson points out that God loves the rich and powerful just as much as He loves the poor and powerless—and this is absolutely true.

But are there obstacles that obstruct the rich and powerful from receiving Jesus that the poor and powerless don't have? What are some of those?

- A diminished awareness of need? Can fame, power, and wealth deceive people into thinking that they are good, that they don't need God, or that they are already right with Him, whereas sickness, poverty, and powerlessness leads people to seek help from God?
- Can the rich and powerful be pursued by people wanting something from them—money, favors, (including from church organizations) so much so that they put barriers up (security, gated communities, staff and employee screeners) so that it is more difficult to reach them individually and also difficult to get materials into their hands?
- Can the rich and powerful have more distractions from whatever real life problems they struggle with—such as travel, entertainments, new and worldly exciting adventures that prevent them from considering the important questions of life?

Any suggestions on reaching the rich and powerful with the gospel?

SUNDAY

The lesson asks us to read Daniel chapter four, which is the dream of Nebuchadnezzar about a great tree that is cut down. That dream prophesied the coming 7 years in which Nebuchadnezzar would be in a psychotic state, living among the animals, and that when he acknowledges the God of heaven his sanity would be restored and he would be restored to the throne of his kingdom.

All of this came to pass and Nebuchadnezzar finally acknowledge the God of heaven.

Read second paragraph,

- A striking example in the Bible of how God reaches powerful unbelievers is the story of King Nebuchadnezzar. God's judgment was executed on him in a way similar to some Israelite kings (see, for example, 2 Chron. 32:25, 26; 1 Kings 14:21–31; 1 Samuel 28). The biblical account of

Nebuchadnezzar, who came to his senses and acknowledged the Creator God, shows that God cares about the wealthy and powerful, as well as the weak and needy. In verse 37, the most powerful man on the earth declared, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down” (Dan. 4:37, NKJV). If only all the rich and powerful and haughty among us mortal beings understood this truth! (Adult SS Guide 4th Q 2023, God’s Mission My Mission p. 73).

Several lessons in this story, first the lesson points out that “God’s judgment was executed” on Nebuchadnezzar in a similar way to some kings of Israel.

What does this mean? How do you hear “judgment”? Was it punishment? Stories like this are sometimes used to suggest God is the source of punishment, the word judgment is understood judicially, is that what is happening here?

The author’s rightly connect God’s judgment against Nebuchadnezzar to His judgment’s against Israel in the past. The author of the book Patriarchs and Prophets writes the following, do you agree?

- "How great is the long-suffering of God toward the wicked! The idolatrous Philistines and backsliding Israel had alike enjoyed the gifts of His providence. Ten thousand unnoticed mercies were silently falling in the pathway of ungrateful, rebellious men. Every blessing spoke to them of the Giver, but they were indifferent to His love. The forbearance of God was very great toward the children of men; **but when they stubbornly persisted in their impenitence, He removed from them His protecting hand.** They refused to listen to the voice of God in His created works, and in the warnings, counsels, and reproofs of His word, and thus **He was forced to speak to them through judgments.**" (Patriarchs and Prophets 587).

What type of judgment is described here and what type of judgment was visited upon Nebuchadnezzar this?

In Scripture there are four judgments:

The First Judgment—is our judgment of God. We see this judgment in Eden when Adam and Eve had to make a judgment, is God trustworthy, or was the serpent right and God is untrustworthy? This same judgment is the one every single human must face—we must decide for ourselves, we must judge, is God trustworthy or not. We see this judgment throughout Scripture, at Mount Carmel, when Elijah confronts the 450 priests of Baal and challenges the people:

- If the LORD is God, worship him; but if Baal is God, worship him! (1 Kings 18:21 GNT).

The apostle Paul picks up this theme and states it explicitly in Roman 3:4:

- Let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: “That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when **You are judged**” (NKJV).

Notice the capital “You.” It is God being judged.

But this judgment of God is not a judicial judgment, it is not a courtroom; it is the judgment of reality, the choice every sentient being throughout the entire universe must make in the aftermath of Satan’s rebellion. And this is the judgment the entire world enters before the second coming of Christ, the judgment we are to call the world to enter:

- I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because **the hour of his judgment** has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Revelation 14:6, 7).

This means that we understand God’s laws are design laws, the protocols that govern reality, and that they are not imperial imposed laws that He must enforce externally.

The first judgment is our judgment of God.

The Second Judgment—are God’s therapeutic judgments to remedy the sin problem.

When we understand design law, we can see that Adam and Eve’s sin did not create a legal problem; it created a lethal problem.

They were not loyal, faithful, and holy beings filled with godly love and trust who were now suddenly in legal trouble with God. No—their sin altered them in such a way that without direct intervention from God, they would die. Their condition was terminal, and every human being born since is born with this same terminal condition.

The Messiah, the Remedy to their terminal state, was promised in Genesis 3; the seed of the woman would come to crush the serpent’s head. While Adam’s sin introduced the death condition, the promised Messiah would bring the cure.

Thus, the entire Old Testament is a record of the battle for human salvation—God working through His agencies to bring Christ, for the purposes of overcoming sin and healing humanity, and Satan working to stop God’s plan.

How could Satan prevent Jesus from being born as a human? By getting every human being to harden their heart so that there wouldn’t be a single woman willing to be the mother of our Messiah. God would not force a woman against her will, and God would not have Jesus born to a vile, hate-filled woman like Jezebel.

The Bible tells us that at the time of the global flood, there was only *one* righteous man left on the earth. Think about it: An entire planet of people and only one person was still loyal to God. The avenue through which the Messiah would come was almost closed. So God made a “judgment.” It was not a judicial judgment. It was a judgment of what was needed to save His precious creation. God decided—judged—that He must protect the family of the one man left loyal to Him so that the Messiah could come, lest every single human be lost. Thus, God sent the flood not as a legal punishment for sin, but as a therapeutic intervention for all humanity, for those who died before the flood (they still needed Jesus to come) and those who have lived since. And also for those who died in the flood.

Noah preached for 120 years, warning of the coming flood and proclaiming God’s grace in providing the ark for anyone who was willing to get on board. No one else did. But think of the gracious opportunity the flood provided those rebellious people. The rains and rising waters were evidence that Noah had been telling the truth. Those evidences gave the rebellious people time to repent before their mortal lives were lost and to experience salvation and receive eternal life. They would be like the thief on the cross next to Christ; he had lived rebelliously but, at the end of his life, he accepted Jesus and received salvation even though his temporal death was unavoidable. The flood was a therapeutic act to keep open the avenue for Messiah to save the world, but it was also therapeutic for the people of that time, giving them one final opportunity to repent. What the flood was not was an infliction of judicial punishment for sin. Even for those who insist on believing the lie that God’s law functions like Satan’s law, I would remind them that even in their false narrative, the judgment for sin is a future event—and punishment for sin is not inflicted before judgment. Thus, the flood is not judicial in any shape or fashion. It is therapeutic.

We find God’s “judgments” throughout history to fall into this category. God’s “judgments” on Egypt were His therapeutic interventions to expose the Egyptian gods as false and to turn the hearts of the people—both Hebrew *and* Egyptian—to Him for salvation.

And here in Daniel we find God’s judgment, His diagnosis and therapeutic judgment, intervention, on what was needed to eradicate selfishness and restore Nebuchadnezzar to love and trust.

This is the judgment of our heavenly physician both providing the Remedy to sin and applying that Remedy to our hearts and minds.

Malachi describes this judgment:

- “Suddenly the Lord you are seeking will **come to his temple**; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; **he will purify the Levites** and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years. **“So I will come near to you for judgment”** (Malachi 3:1–5 NIV84).

This is the “judgment” of the Great Heavenly Physician, our Creator: examining us, diagnosing what is wrong in us, and determining what is the best therapeutic intervention to bring to bear to heal and restore us. This is the judgment of our High Priest going on in heaven as He examines the people and prepares them for His return, to complete His healing of them so that when He does come, we will be like Him—for “we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2 NIV84). This healing, this transformation, this final work of preparation is what Malachi describes above—the cleansing of our temples, the purifying of the Levites (His people today), is all taught metaphorically in the Day of Atonement rituals. (You can read more about this incredible truth in our [*Heavenly Sanctuary and Investigative Judgment for the Modern World*](#) pamphlet.)

The first judgment is our judgment of God and the second judgment is God’s therapeutic diagnosis of the problem and therapeutic intervention to treat the problem. Neither the first or second judgment is a judicial process.

The Third Judgment—is the judgment that the righteous render during the thousand years after they are taken to heaven and all the evidence of history is before them.

- I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to **judge**. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20:4–6 NIV84).

This is also not a judicial process; it is an answering of all the questions people have about the great controversy. It is the assessment, discerning, and settling of minds regarding how God’s laws govern all reality. It is the confirmation of what sin does and how salvation occurs—and why some are saved and others are not when God loves all equally, wants all to be saved, and is all powerful.

This judgment by the saints includes more than judging why some of our friends and loved ones are not in heaven; it also includes judging what the angels did and how they possibly could have rebelled:

- “Do you not know that we will **judge** angels?” (1 Corinthians 6:3 NIV84).

This is the judgment in which the saved exercise their God-given ability to think, reason, discern and settle all their questions so that sin will never arise again.

The third judgment is also not a judicial process but a review of reality, of actual history, of applying our understanding of the design laws of God and making the judgment that all who are lost are lost because that is what they prefer and that there was nothing more God could have done for them.

The Fourth and final Judgment—is the judgment that occurs at the end of the thousand years. It is often called the Great White Throne Judgment.

- I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. ... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were **judged** according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:11, 12 NIV84).

Surely this judgment must be judicial ... right? No, it isn't.

What is recorded in the books of life? The names of people (Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:15, 21:27). But in Scripture, names are symbolic of one's character. So, what is recorded is our actual characters, which we have developed through our judgment of God—our judgment to trust Him, to open our hearts to Him, to embrace His design laws and methods of truth, love, and liberty or not. Our judgments of God result in whether we open the heart and are reborn—or harden our hearts in selfishness. Our characters develop along whichever line our judgment decides about God, whether we trust Him and His methods or reject them. Thus, we are judged, diagnosed, based on what is the actual condition of our character.

Here's another way to say it: The books record the accurate picture of who we are in heart—they are like medical records. The records don't determine the condition; they merely record the condition.

This is exactly what Jesus taught when He said:

- Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on **the day of judgment** for every careless word they have spoken. **For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned** (Matthew 12:33–37 NIV84).

What is being described? Character—the actual condition of each heart, a diagnosis of what the reality actually is. God is the God of reality, the builder of all Creation. His laws are the protocols upon which life operates. There has never been a heavenly judicial law court like humans make; the idea that God is an arbitrary judge who is the source of inflicted punishment for sin is a lie from Satan.

The fourth and final judgment is not judicial; it is the final confirmation of the accurate diagnosis of each heart and mind:

- He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still (Revelation 22:11 NKJV).

Another lesson from this story of Nebuchadnezzar is to contrast his response from the events in Daniel 3, when the three worthies were saved from the fiery furnace and his response here.

Let's contrast the two responses of the king identify what is different and decide if there is a lesson in that for us today:

- Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way." (Daniel 3:28-29 NIV84).
- At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (Daniel 4:34-37 NIV84).

First what are the similarities about the two events:

- In both God provided a dream of the future to the king, in the first it was the dream of the multi-metal man and in the second it was the dream of the tree
- In both God intervened with a miracle, the miracle of protecting the three worthies from the fiery furnace and the second the miracle of the restored sanity
- In both the king acknowledges the God of heaven

So God's actions are quite similar in both situations and Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the God of heaven in both. But there is a key difference in the second experience than the first what is it?

In the first situation the king responds with imperialism, with power, might, coercion. He acknowledges the God of heaven as a powerful being, but not as a righteous being and thus Nebuchadnezzar promotes falsehoods about God by creating a religious edict under threat of external punishment.

In the second experience Nebuchadnezzar also acknowledges God as the powerful God of heaven, but now also acknowledges God as righteous, as a being worthy of trust and does not impose laws for force others to worship, but instead gives his testimony, presenting the truth, but leaving others free to decide for themselves.

Is there a lesson for us in this?

MONDAY

The lesson is about Naaman the commander of the armies of Aram who had leprosy and whose slave girl was Jewish and told him about Elisha. How he went to Elisha and was told to wash 7 times in the Jordan. How he initially didn't want to do this, but was encouraged by his advisors and did so and was healed of the leprosy and in the aftermath became a worshiper of Yahweh.

When he meets with Elisha before returning to Aram, he makes two requests, read the second and third paragraphs:

- In 2 Kings 5:17–19, Naaman made two unusual requests after God healed him of leprosy. First, he asked to take two mule-loads of earth from Israel back to Syria for the purpose of worshiping the living God. He states, “For your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to the other gods, but to the Lord” (2 Kings 5:17, NKJV). Though Naaman is clearly now a believer in the only true God, his first request shows that pagan influences still held sway over his thinking to a degree. The Syrian commander regarded the God of Israel as a divinity who must be venerated on soil native to that land. Although Naaman acknowledged the reality that there was no God aside from the Lord of Israel, he had not wholly dispossessed himself of the notion that God was, by some particular means, connected to the land of Israel. Thus, in his own country he desired to worship God on Israelite soil.

Naaman's second petition shows the sincerity of his faith. While he resolved to serve only the God of heaven, he realized carrying out such a resolution in his own idolatrous country wouldn't be easy. Moverover, the king of Syria still worshiped the god Rimmon, and in this occupation Naaman would serve as the king's escort. While Naaman had no intention of forsaking his duties to his earthly king, he did not wish to be deemed as bowing in worship to Rimmon. Having surrendered his heart to Jehovah, Naaman desired not to make any concessions to idolatry by worshiping the heathen god. Nor did he want word to get back to Elisha that he was doing so. (Adult SS Guide 4th Q 2023, God's Mission My Mission p. 74).

What do you think of Naaman, his conversion, and his requests?

First the request to take soil back to his homeland to in order to worship God—what is this about? Is this necessary? Why does Naaman do it? What is it evidence of? Limited understanding of God and the reality of our Creator and the universe He governs. Naaman is thinking with limited understanding, perhaps that God is a local god, or His power is connected to the local land in some way and without having some of that soil then Naaman will be disconnected from the power of God.

Would this be a form of superstition? Have superstitions and superstitious thinking ever entered into Christianity? Any examples?

- Veneration of relics
- Pilgrimages—the idea of going to a certain place in order to receive a blessing not obtainable without going to that place

- What about magical thinking regarding Christian ceremonies—like communion? Can superstitious ideas be attached to the communion ceremony? What about the wafer become the literal human flesh of Jesus? What about the wafers becoming somehow holy in a way that they cannot be donated for food to the needy but must be burned if not used in the ceremony?
- Certain types of dress that have religious value?
- Do we ever believe we have to go to certain geographical locations to worship God—perhaps a denominational building of some sort? If we, instead of going to a church building, instead went to someone’s home for worship would it be as legitimate?

If some people do attach superstitious meanings to things like communion, or where one worships—does that mean there is no righteous, healthy, legitimate utility in going to a church to worship or participating in communion?

What about the second request—to not have to take a public stand and refuse to bow down to the idol of Rimmon? And who was Rimmon? It was another name for Baal—and who was Baal?

- The son of El
- The god of weather, thunder, lightning, and harvest
- The god who fought the great leviathan—the serpent
- The god who fought against Mot the god of death and in his battle with Mot died and rose again to bring new life and harvest to the land

This was the god previously confronted by Elijah at Mount Carmel—and what was wrong with this god? Baal required appeasement, payment, offerings be made to him to provide blessings.

Baal became Zeus to the Greeks, Jupiter to the Romans, Thor to the Norse people and Jesus Christ to all Christians who worship a god who requires the blood of a human sacrifice be offered to him on order for him to provide blessings.

Do we today want to act the part of Naaman, say to God, I believe in you the Creator. I know you are not like Baal, but let me be like Naaman, let me quietly bow down in my church where they present Baal in your place, where the people are worshipping a god of thunder, a god of wrath, a god that requires the blood payment of Jesus be presented in order for that god not to harm. You know I don’t believe it, but forgive my compliance with the religious edits coming from church authority as I bow, for I might be called to account by the church board, I might be disfellowshipped, I might lose my job for I like Naaman work for those who worship Baal in your place.

Do we live in a different time than Naaman? Is God, at this time in human history, calling for a people to no longer bow down to the false views of Him presented by church leaders and for His people to take a stand for His true character of love, to stand up and worship Him as Creator, to worship Him who made the heavens, earth, sea and fountains of water, whose laws are design laws, to give glory to God for the hour has come for people to make a right judgment about God—the hour of HIS judgment has come!

TUESDAY

The title for the day's lesson is Witnessing to the Learned: Nicodemus

What is the key to witnessing to the learned, to those who are considered, by themselves and others, to be subject matter experts?

It requires a disruption in their current understanding, what we call cognitive dissonance. This can occur from:

- presenting something new and positive that intrigues them to study from a new angle and incorporate previously unconsidered evidence
- presenting evidence or questions that don't fit their current understanding, questions or facts important enough that they can't simply ignore them or brush them aside
- or life experiences, typically painful ones, that their current understanding don't explain and resolve
- others?

But if a person doesn't have any interest, if their minds are closed into a belief system that doesn't allow for questions, doesn't allow for growth and development, then truth is not received positively, it is received as a threat, as a challenge, typically to their authority, their security, their orthodoxy and new truth is often labeled heresy and the ones bringing it are called heretics and are exterminated—either literally or structurally—i.e. disfellowshipped, disavowed, removed from office, slandered, and ridiculed.

One of the primary beliefs that prevents the learned from accepting greater light and truth is the belief that “We have the truth” and that idea is typically set up as a system of orthodox doctrines, a creed, or a set of fundamental beliefs, and any new truth that either overthrows or expands or redefines the current belief is considered heresy. The fear is that if our current belief is not 100% accurate then we were wrong, led astray, deceived, and therefore our movement our system, our church is illegitimate. So we must resist any changes advancements and unfolding of truth for fear of being wrong.

But the true of heart recognize that we created beings are finite and God is infinite and His truth is unfolding and we never stop advancing in the truth, so we eagerly pursue new truth that will correct any actual error but often will simply redefine truths in deeper and more meaningful ways with greater insight and understanding toward ultimate reality.

Such as moving from metaphor, symbol, ritual to reality—a good example is sanctuary service of the Old Testament being moved toward the heavenly sanctuary with our heavenly High Priest in Hebrews and then moving from symbolic understandings of events happening in books, to the reality of the sanctuary being the living beings where God dwells by His Spirit and Jesus working to cleanse people, not records, from sin.

But some have difficulty in moving past the symbolic to the reality, of following the truth—the Jews had this problem and rejected Jesus and many Adventist have this problem and reject the healing understanding of salvation and continue to teach legal mechanics in heavenly courtrooms.

So how do we witness to the learned?

The lesson uses the example of Nicodemus—did Jesus pursue Nicodemus, seek him out, go to his house, send him literature, invite him to a Bible study, email him links to sermons? Or did Jesus go about revealing in the community the truth and allow the impact of Jesus' teaching to reach Nicodemus and the Holy Spirit flamed those truths into conviction which eventually led Nicodemus to search for answers himself, ultimately from Jesus?

Is there a lesson for us in this?

If we have a relationship with the learned, they are our friends or family members, then certainly engage them in conversation and share materials with them to try and lead them into truths you are convicted they need to understand. But has not been my experience that it is fruitful to seek out the professors and scholars to inform them of what they don't know if they are not seeking on their own.

One way, if you have a relationship with someone of learning, to get them to evaluate something new, is to ask them to read it and share their critique. However, this is likely to harden them from the truth rather than lead them into it, why? Because they are reading it not to learn truth, but to discover the errors in it, thus they read it with a bias seeking to confirm their preconceived understanding, rather than to expand their understanding.

Read bottom pink section:

- Why must we be careful of the trap of thinking that because “we have the truth” (which we do), then the knowledge of this truth alone is enough to save us? How many souls will be lost who had more than enough knowledge, even of the three angels' messages, to be saved? (Adult SS Guide 4th Q 2023, God's Mission My Mission p. 75).

Don't most people believe that they have truth? Does believing one has the truth mean one has the truth?

- Did Saul of Tarsus, before the Damascus road, believe he had the truth? Did he?
- What about Peter when Paul had to correct him, do you think Peter thought, “I know I am misrepresenting Christ and not presenting the truth” or do you think he thought he had the truth?
- What about in Luke 9:54 when James and John saw Jesus being rejected and asked if they should call fire down from heaven to destroy the people—do you think they believed their request was based on truth?

So, the lesson says that we have the truth and they specifically mention the truth of the three angels—but does our church present the truth of the three angels, or has the truth been replaced with a counterfeit?

EGW wrote:

- **It is a fact that we have the truth**, and we must hold with tenacity to the positions that cannot be shaken; but we must not look with suspicion upon any **new light which God may send**, and say, Really, we cannot see that we need any more light than the **old truth** which we have hitherto received, and in which we are settled. While we hold to this position, the testimony of the True Witness applies to our cases its rebuke, “And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Those who feel rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing, are in a condition of blindness as to their true condition before God, and they know it not. (The Review and Herald, August 7, 1894).
- **Greater light shines upon us than shone upon our fathers.** We cannot be accepted or honored of God in rendering the same service, or doing the same works, that our fathers did. In order to be accepted and blessed of God as they were, we must imitate their faithfulness and zeal,—**improve our light as they improved theirs**, and do as they would have done had they lived in our day. **We must walk in the light which shines upon us, otherwise that light will become darkness.** (Testimonies for the Church 1:262).

What do these statements mean? Do you agree with them?

How can light become darkness? Was it light in AD 5, when Jesus was two years old, that the Messiah was soon to be revealed in Israel? That the Savior of the world was coming to fulfill the promises made to Adam and Eve and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Absolutely! After AD 33, after Jesus’ rejection and crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven—is it still light, still truth, that the Messiah is going to be born in Israel, that the Messiah is yet to come or has that truth now become darkness for those who do not advance in truth?

If you haven’t read our magazine [The Final Message of Mercy to the World: The Three Angels I](#) would encourage you to do so, for we go into great detail revealing what we understand to be the truth of this message, and it is quite distinct from what we read in much of the SDA literature.

And the root cause of the difference is how one understands God’s law. If one understands God’s law to be imposed rules like humans make up, then the interpretation of Scripture including the 3 angels goes down a legal path, a path that creates a god that functions like a creature, a false god, the modern-day Baal worship.

But when we return to worshipping the Creator and understand His laws are design laws, then one reads the 3 angels as they are supposed to be read—God’s final warning of how reality works and what happens to those who reject Him and His design laws.

The high points of the messages are:

- The central thread of the messages are about worship
- The first angel focuses on the eternal good news—which is the good news about God—that He is not like Satan alleged, He is the God of Creation, whose laws are design laws. We are called back to worship Him as Creator and not as a creature, and thus give Him glory in our lives for the hour in human history has come for people to make a right judgment about God.
- When we recognize the truth about God then we realize the system of imposed law with a punishing god is the fallen system of Babylon of confusion with over 41,000 different groups arguing this text or that text and we leave that way of thinking and functioning behind and return to worship our Creator.
- But if we don't do that then, by the law of worship, by beholding we are changed, and we become like the false creature god we worship, and are marked in our characters (foreheads) and works (hands) to be like the beastly god we worship and
- Via the law of liberty we are set free to reap that which we have sown into our hearts, minds, and souls and God gives people freedom, and let's them go to reap the results of their own choice when He stops using His power to protect them from what sin does and this is know as God's wrath. And when God no longer shields people they reap the suffering unremedied sin brings when
- Via the law of love and truth they come into full awareness of their own selfishness, guilt, shame, when they can no longer hide from the reality of who they are by their own choice.

Nothing in the messages are imperial, legal, penal, they are all descriptions of God's character of love and design law methods being worked out.

WEDNESDAY

The lesson references the rich young ruler who came to Jesus, what lessons can we learn from that story?

- A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18 NIV84).

The story begins with the young man addressing Jesus as though Jesus were no different than any other Bible teacher, Rabbi, or theology professor. He does not acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior, God in human form. Jesus will draw his attention to this shortly.

And upon what is the young man's primary focus, the central issue of his concern? On self, on securing for himself eternal life. He did not ask Jesus, "What must I do to bring honor to God?" Or "What must I do to fulfill God's purpose for my life?" Or "How can I serve God most fully?" Or "How can I know God's will for my life?"

How much of church tradition encourages this same self-centered focus? How much evangelism suggests that the gospel message is primarily about individual salvation? Certainly, Jesus came to save sinners—absolutely true:

- For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NIV84).

But the more important question in this wonderful promise is: What does it say about God that He would sacrifice Himself to save us? It is certainly good news that we can be saved from sin, but isn't the better news that God is love? After all, who would want to live forever with God if God was like Satan in character?

We are called to bring sinners to Christ for salvation. But is it possible that if Christianity takes the primary focus off of God and His character of love and places it on ourselves, it can become something selfish—something that burdens people, because it becomes about what they must do, focuses on their behavior, with the do's and don'ts of various lists of rules that all work to keep self at the center, preoccupied with a fear of sinning, ruminating on the memories of our past sins, and suffering with chronic guilt and shame and worries of not being good enough? And might we find that we end up like this young man, going to Jesus and saying, "What else must I do to be saved?"

Notice how Jesus responds:

- "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone (Luke 18:19 NIV84).
- "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments" (Matthew 19:17 NIV84).

Jesus does several things here. First, by pointing out that only God is good and asking why the young man called Him good, Jesus is seeking to help the man realize that Jesus is God in human form. But Jesus is also saying, *"If you don't recognize me as God, if you recognize me only as a teacher, then why are you calling me good—all goodness comes from God. Don't fall into the trap of attributing to human teachers or church leaders the admiration, respect, and trust that belong only to God."*

Jesus then turns the attention to the path of life, which is living in harmony with God's law, for God's law—of health, physics, and morality—is the protocol upon which life is constructed to operate. Life and health are only possible as one lives in harmony with the laws of health, and Jesus is trying to help this young man realize that by first drawing his attention to the commandments and then expanding their meaning to something far beyond rule-keeping. But the young ruler doesn't appear to comprehend.

- "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” (Matthew 19:18–20 NIV84).

Here Jesus recites some of the Ten Commandments but then adds the meaning “love your neighbor as yourself.” Love honors others; love doesn’t seek to harm, exploit, or take advantage of others. Therefore, love doesn’t murder, cheat, bear false witness, or steal; love doesn’t even have the desire in the heart to harm; thus, love doesn’t covet. Jesus is saying, *“If you want to have life, you must be restored to my kingdom of love, and then you will keep the commandments.”*

Jesus was not reciting a list of rules for a legal religion; instead, He was describing what people look like when love is restored in the heart. Jesus is revealing that the commandments are not legal; they are not a code of conduct to be legally enforced; they are a description of how love functions and how people who love others live.

When we have God’s love restored into our hearts, we affirmatively *do not* commit adultery, steal, murder, bear false witness, or covet *because* we love others and it would be disgusting and repulsive to do such things. Just consider how repulsive even the mere thought of abusing your child is. Those who are like Christ would rather die than harm those they love. This is what Jesus is describing—people who love simply *do not* do these things to others.

But notice that the young man did not respond with, “I have loved like this my entire life.” Instead, he responded by focusing on rule-keeping without regard to a heart renewed to love, merely a legal performance of external behavior. Yet, he realized that such a legal performance lacked something, so he asked Jesus what was missing from his life.

All those who have a legal religion also experience the same lack of inner peace, and what kind of people do they become if they don’t experience God’s love transforming their heart? Pharisaical, legalists, judgmental, critical, controlling of others, imperial—just like those religious people who crucified Jesus.

So...

- Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21 NIV84).

Jesus is not setting up a new rule here to be obeyed if we want treasure in heaven. He is accurately pointing out to this young man that the man valued his riches and trusted in material things more than he loved and trusted Jesus. He trusted his wealth in part because it was taught that wealth was evidence of being right with God, while poverty meant one was cursed by God. But eternal life cannot be found in earthly wealth, power, position, or status—only in surrendering the heart fully to Christ.

- When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth (Matthew 19:22 NIV84).

Why did the young man leave sorrowful? Because he placed his security in earthly treasure rather than in Jesus. Contrast this man’s response with that of

Zacchaeus:

- But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:8–10 NIV84).

Zacchaeus found something he valued more than money, and he suddenly found joy in using his money to help others. Sadly, the rich young ruler did not.

As we face the final events leading up to Christ’s return, many of us will be faced with a similar choice—do we, like Zacchaeus, value Jesus more than our material possessions, or do we, like the young ruler, value our wealth more than Christ? Do we cling to our possessions to make us feel safe? Do we love God and others more than self, or do we fear for ourselves so that we will join with the government to exploit others? Will we obey the government and join in coercing consciences so that we can keep our wealth so we can continue buying and selling, or will we stand firm for God’s kingdom and lose our earthly wealth and cling to Jesus and the treasures of heaven? Jesus is coming soon—make Him your greatest treasure!