

Role Models For Last Day Living Part V: Jesus

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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For the last few weeks we've been considering "Role Models for Last Day Living," as revealed by stories from the Bible. We obtain our information for these things from God's Book, the Holy Bible. This is His chosen medium to reveal truth to us. Other books may be fine to read, but the Bible is God's supreme written revelation. We must take it as the primary source of information concerning matters of the Christian life and if other information is in conflict with it, we must choose the Bible above all other resources. There is no doubt but that we are living during what the Bible calls the "last days." Fulfilled prophecies shout at us from every direction as a wake-up call to rouse us from our sleep and to be wide awake.

We've noticed John the Baptist, with his emphasis on the coming of the Messiah; Elijah, with his call to return to the worship of the Creator God; Noah and his preaching of the "end of the world;" and Daniel's sterling example as one who gained the victory in diet, skill in prophecy, answers to prayer and stood firm for God when the time of testing came.

Today we consider Jesus as are Example in last day living. Of all the excellent illustrations given through various characters recorded by the Scriptures, we should pay the greatest attention to the One Whose life is explicitly set forth as our Example. We are told, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps." I Peter 2:21. He is the One Who, by His own footprints, traced out a path through this mine field of sin.

Christ's coming to this earth was to accomplish many things, including providing the Sacrifice for sin, as well as providing an example of how to live. Who is this Jesus? The Bible tells us that He is the Creator God, the One through Whom all things came to be. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." John 1:1-3. We are told a few verses later that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Bible reveals Jesus to be eternal, omnipotent and omniscient, sharing the qualities of divinity with His Father and the Holy Spirit from the beginning.

It was this Jesus Who pledged to become man's Savior when sin entered. By His righteous life and death, He paid for the sins of the "whole world" (I John 2:2), providing salvation for every person, which will be experienced by "every one that believes." His life is the pattern for every Christian who ever lived. "Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps our pathway." Psalm 85:13.

But in a very special way, Christ's life is a pattern for those who live at the end of time. And, more particularly, the very last hours of Christ's life before His death on the cross have important points of similarity for those who live at the end of time. In prophetic vision, John's eyes were directed to the Lamb Who stood on Mount Zion. With Him are the 144,000, the ones alive when Jesus comes back to this earth. They are the ones shown in Revelation 7 as having received the seal of God in their foreheads and in Revelation 14, within the context of God's last day message, as being the "first fruits" that are "harvested" when Jesus comes in the clouds with the sickle in His hand.

The passage describes them as being the ones who "follow the Lamb wherever He goes." The reason the 144,000 will "follow the Lamb" up there is that they "followed the Lamb" down here.

They "follow the Lamb." That's a very interesting description! The Lamb is certainly Jesus, and as we've seen, He's worthy of our emulation. But usually the metaphor of following the Lord is expressed by the well known Bible illustration of a shepherd leading his sheep. David wrote in His psalm, "The LORD is my Shepherd." Psalm 23:1. (As you know, when the name of the LORD is printed in all capital letters in the Old Testament, it is the Hebrew Yahweh, or Jehovah. Jesus is the "Shepherd," isn't He? Jesus is the Yahweh of the Bible.)

In this text in Revelation, though, the image is modified. It is the Lamb Who leads His sheep! The "Lamb" is the "Shepherd." It is still Jesus, the Lord, but it is Jesus as the Lamb, the sacrificial Victim that it is emphasizing. It is speaking specifically of Jesus as the Sacrifice. It is speaking of Jesus in His experience as He offered Himself on the cross. The saints at the end of time will follow in the footsteps of Jesus during His last moments.

So, the question for our study today is, What happened in those last few hours of His earthly life that can be seen as of particular importance to those who live in earth's final hour? What did Jesus experience at the end of His life that can encourage us and teach us who live today?

Notice first of all Christ in agony and making a total surrender. Following the institution of the Last Supper that Thursday evening, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He had often found seclusion to pray. But this time was different. He was beginning to feel the weight of the sins of the world, the guilt of our transgressions and it wrung from His heart the woeful prayer of agony. He confessed to His disciples, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." He fell to the ground and pleaded, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Matthew 26:38, 39.

The "cup" He referred to was the cup of guilt and judgment, the experience of the lost sinner. It crushed Him as the "the LORD laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:6. Gethsemane was a garden among olive trees, atop "the Mount of Olives." The word "Gethsemane" means "the place of the press," referring to where the olives were crushed to emit the valuable oil so necessary in their economy for cooking and for fuel. Olive oil gave light, warmth and food, but extreme pressure had to be applied to the olives in order to yield this benefit. In the garden was such a press which accomplished this task. Here is where the olives grown were crushed into olive oil. Here is where Christ's spirit was "crushed" by the weight of our sins. He was beginning to feel the separation from His Father that sin ultimately brings. The guilt and woe weighed on Him in a way that we'll never have to know.

The battle for salvation was being waged! The outcome, not just concerning our salvation, but the security of the whole universe, trembled in the balance. Would Christ, the divine Son of God win, or would Satan triumph? Would Lucifer's original challenge, that it is impossible to obey, be shown to be true, or would God's proposition that obedience is possible and necessary for the good of the universe be proven right? If God Himself couldn't obey, then what hope would His creatures have of compliance? If Christ yielded to sin, Satan would conquer. In His humanity, Christ shrank from the ordeal. He strongly desired to avoid the conflict. But He never broke His commitment to His Father. Though tempted intensely, He did not yield to Satan's temptation to avoid the cross. He surrendered His will to God.

Christ's followers will "follow the Lamb" in a similar way. No, they won't have to feel the weight of guilt; Christ bore it for us. But there will be an ordeal through which they must pass. There will be something like a "Gethsemane" experience. In the Bible it is called "Jacob's trouble." The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his

loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." Jeremiah 30:5-7.

Jacob, you remember, had sinned greatly. He had deceived his father respecting the birthright, masquerading as his brother Esau. He had to leave his home and was absent 20 years. During those years Jacob repented from his sin and was converted. Now, on his way back to Palestine with his wives, children and flocks, he hears news that his brother is on his way to meet him with 400 armed men.

During the night, Jacob is awakened by an Assailant and they struggle. Jacob at first thinks that it is Esau or one of his men, but as the struggle continues he comes to realize that his Adversary is not human but divine. When the day is about to break, his Opponent wants to leave, but Jacob clings to Him and will not relinquish his hold without being blessed.

The prophet Jeremiah said that this ordeal will be similar to what the saints experience at the end. Jacob had sinned, that is true. But he had acknowledged, confessed and forsaken his sin, and done all within his power to make it right. He was forgiven. Though conscious of his unworthiness, he could recall no sin for which he had not obtained absolution. The struggle was with One Who turned out to be his Lord and Savior.

Thus the saints will agonize (our word "agony" comes from the New Testament word "to struggle") in their "Gethsemane" experience prior to Jesus' return. They will know that the day of probation is over. They will know that the door of the "ark" has been closed. The plagues are falling, in fulfillment of Revelation's prophecy. The questions on their minds will be, "Is my record clear? Is there any stain of sin on my heart? Has my soul been washed of every defilement? Have I lived to honor the name of my dear Savior?"

And yet, they can call to mind no sin for which repentance has not been made and for which forgiveness has not been applied. Though they pass through an agonizing ordeal, they throw their weight entirely on the merits of Jesus, their Savior. Any last ties and sympathies to this world are consumed in the fires of their experience. Their earnest desire is to be totally surrendered to His will and honor His name. Whatever physical adversity they pass through pales in comparison with the mental conflict they endure. "But he shall be saved out of it"! Remember that promise! Christ conquered in Gethsemane; through His grace, so will His followers.

While in Gethsemane, Christ prayed fervently. He “poured out His soul unto death.” Isaiah 53:12. When speaking to His disciples, He counseled, “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” Matthew 26:41. The word translated “watch” is the Greek word *gregoreo* (the name “Gregory” comes from that word), which means “to be alert, watchful, awake.” This is what the saints need to be in this last hour. It’s time to be awake, alert and watchful. It’s time for the sleeping saints to awaken to the crisis hour. It’s time to spend a thoughtful hour with the Lord in prayer, study of His Word and meditation as a part of our daily pattern. When Jesus came to the slumbering disciples He asked them a question. What was it? “Could you not watch with Me one hour?” Jesus asks us that question today!

In Gethsemane Christ was betrayed and arrested. One of His disciples, Judas, turned against Him and led the way, placing the betrayer’s kiss on His cheek. Like Ahithophel, who sympathized with Absalom in his rebellion and betrayed David, Judas betrayed his Lord. Jesus warned us that this will be repeated. “Many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.” Matthew 24:10. “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends.” Luke 21:16. The Bible teaches us, “Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.” Psalm 146:3. Our trust needs to be firmly rooted in God. While we appreciate the fellowship of friends, it is possible that they may let us down. If that happens, know that there is a Friend Who sticks closer than a brother; His name is Jesus.

From Gethsemane, Christ was taken to trial, to stand before the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod and Pilate again. Charges were levied against Christ, but they were false and couldn’t stand. As with the case of Daniel which we studied last week, nothing could be found against Him. “I find no fault in Him,” was the declaration of Pilate. Though uttered by pagan lips, what a testimony it was! The ungodly Pilate, a theologian? Yes!

Some of the saints will likewise be put on trial for their faith. Man-made laws in violation of God’s law will bring about a point of decision. Those who love Jesus will say as did Peter, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Acts 5:29. But this conviction will result in confiscation of property, imprisonment and worse. For the saints, it will increase the longing for the day of their Lord’s return!

Jesus endured cruel mocking and physical abuse. They flogged Him with the brutal Roman whip, whose tails were embedded with sharp pieces of metal. Said the Psalmist, “The plowers plowed on My back; they made their furrows long.” Psalm

129:3. The blood freely ran, both from His back and from His brow where they had planted the crown of thorns. They ridiculed and cajoled; they spat, made sport and taunted the dear Lord. Satan's agents were among them as they denounced and derided the Man of righteousness, but He didn't give in.

To a lesser degree, many of God's faithful will pass through a similar experience. There is no deliverance without travail; no birth without pain. That prediction accompanied the entrance of sin. But the redeemed will count it a most precious privilege to participate in Christ's anguish and suffer for His name. The enemy won't go down without a last ditch effort to loosen the hold of God's children. He will do everything in his power to try to cause them to relinquish their grip of faith, but for the saints who have the "faith of Jesus," this is not possible. The fires of persecution cause the gold to shine with greater radiance. The night of trial causes the stars of righteousness to gleam more brilliantly.

Let's think of how Jesus responded to His questioners. When Christ stood before His accusers, there was a combination of silence and eloquence. The Bible records that before the Sanhedrin, "the high priest arose and said to Him, 'Do you answer nothing? What is it that these men testify against you?' But Jesus kept silent." Matthew 26:62. Before Pilate we read, "And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly." Matthew 26:12, 14. Before the wily Herod we read, "Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing." Luke 23:9. Prophesied Isaiah, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." Isaiah 53:7.

There are times when no answer is the best answer. Silence can sometimes make a greater impact than words. God will give the wisdom to know when it is best to refrain from words and let His Spirit do the speaking. To argue and wrangle is rarely productive. Paul counsels us not "to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers." II Timothy 2:14. For those empty questions that sought to mock and not learn, Christ had no answer.

On the other hand, there were times when it would have been wrong for Christ not to respond. His answers were brief and to the point. When placed "under oath" by the high priest who said, "I adjure You by the living God that You tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God," Jesus said to him, 'It is as you said.'" Matthew 26:63. Likewise, some of the saints will be placed on the witness stand and asked questions. When brought before kings and rulers for His name's sake, Jesus said,

“It will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.” Luke 21:13-15.

Jesus conquered in His trial because He knew Who He was. From early childhood He had been taught by His mother about the angel’s announcement before He was conceived; of the witness of Elizabeth before His birth; of the angelic choir and visit of the shepherds; of the gift of the magi in Bethlehem; of the testimony of Simeon and Anna in the temple. When He was but twelve He saw the lamb of sacrifice in the temple of Jerusalem and knew His destiny. He heard the witness of John the Baptist at the beginning of His ministry. Fueled by the conviction and power of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures, He entered His work, ever conscious of Who He was. Now standing on trial and asked if it were true that He was the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of God, He could truly say, “It is as you said.” He knew Who He was. There was not the slightest hint of doubt or wavering in His confidence.

Likewise, it is incumbent on us to know “who we are.” We are sinners, but recipients of God’s gift of salvation as “brands plucked from the fire.” If the devil tells you that you are a great sinner, don’t argue with him! Say to him, “You’re right. I am a great sinner, but Jesus is a great Savior. He came to save sinners, and I accept Him as my Redeemer and Lord.” Through Christ we are heirs to an immortal prize. If there were to be the slightest equivocation in the minds of the saints when this time comes, they would be vanquished. But there is not! They know they have been redeemed and their salvation is secure through the blood of the Lamb. They are children of the King!

When questioned by Pilate Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Everyone who would stand on that last day will have followed Christ in the cultivation of this principle, this perspective, this way of thinking. There will be pressure applied to deny Christ by the confiscation of material goods, the breaking of relationships or persecution of the physical body. The saint’s mindset will be “my kingdom is not of this world.”

The saints will know firsthand the rich meaning of the words authored by the reformer Martin Luther who wrote in that great hymn “A Mighty Fortress,” “Let goods and kindred go; this mortal life also. The body they may kill. God’s truth abideth still. His kingdom is forever.”

Should there be any earthly thing that would hold them here, the saints would falter, but they will not. They will confess, “My kingdom is not of this world.”

Jesus is our great Example. He trod the path before us. His ordeal during His last hours is an encouraging pattern for us to follow. Though the path may be steep, by His grace it can be gained. He will never leave or forsake us. The battle rages, but the victory is secure. What a time to live for Jesus!