Sabbath (August 17): Seeking the Lost

Luke 15 contains three powerful parables about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost— or prodigal—son. Each of these stories represents a different type of “lost” condition that we as humans can find ourselves, or others, in. In today’s lesson we will look more closely at these parables, and look for lessons about how we can best reach people in each of these situations.

Discussion Questions:

- Read Luke 15:1-7. What type of “lost” person might the lost sheep represent? (Those who know they are lost but cannot find their way to God.) In terms of those who are less fortunate in life, what life situations might the lost lamb might represent? (Those who realize their disadvantaged or oppressed situation but have no ability to change it or improve it.) How can we as Christians best help this type of person? (Answers will vary.)

- Read Luke 15:8-10. What type of “lost” person might the lost coin represent? (Those who do not know they are lost, and are not looking for God.) In terms of those who are less fortunate in life, what life situations might the lost coin represent? (Those who do not recognize or understand the reasons that have led to their disadvantaged condition.) How can we as Christians best help this type of person? (Answers will vary.)

- Read Luke 15:11-32. What type of “lost” person might the prodigal son represent? (Those who know they are lost, and know the way to God, but refuse to come to Him.) In terms of those who are less fortunate in life, what life situations might the prodigal son represent? (Those who have made bad decisions and are reaping the results of those decisions.) How can we as Christians best help this type of person? (Answers will vary.)

Sunday (August 18): Introducing the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest sermon ever told, and part of the reason is that it’s not so much a speech or a sermon as we often hear, but rather a practical teaching session which connects to everyone as it was drawn from all aspects of life. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ gives words of wisdom that no human intellect could ever match; it shows what the Lord is willing to do in and for them who yield to Him. In today’s lesson, we’ll look at the introduction of the sermon and draw lessons on attending those in need.
Discussion Questions:

- Read Matthew 5:2-12. Do the blessings described here come only from the Lord? (Man cannot give the blessings as only the Lord sees the condition for the blessing.) What type of requirements are there to receive the blessings here described? (There is really only one requirement, as the base of all others, and that is to be poor in spirit.) Why are these blessings better than temporal blessings? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Matthew 5:13. What does it mean to be the salt of the earth? (In this world of sin Christ expects his disciples to be the “flavor” or “spice” that provides a reason to be a Christian. Also, being salt will create a thirsting after Jesus. It is not about giving people something; it is pointing them to what gives meaning to life.) What warning is there to those who are not the salt of the earth? (To be cast out, to be rejected as their lives were found to be lacking purpose, even when they were supposed to be disciples of Jesus.)
- Read Matthew 5:14-16. What does it mean to be the light of the world? (The light of the world is Jesus, but it has to become our own light. We are to possess His character, and it is His beauty that must be shown. If it doesn’t become our own, it will never last. It is shown with good works, with the fruits of Jesus living in our heart and shining to the world.)

Monday (August 19): Overcoming Evil With Good

All of us face, to some degree or another, evil and injustice in our lives. Usually, we have little or no control over how or when we face these things. However, we do have a choice in how we respond. Today’s lesson takes a closer look at how we can overcome evil with good in our lives today.

Discussion Questions:

- Read Matthew 5:38-42. What advice does Jesus give here about how Christians should respond to evil and injustice around them, or in their lives? (Return good for evil.)
- Read Matthew 5:43,44. What specific steps does Jesus identify that will enable Christians to overcome evil with good? (Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which persecute you.) Are there any of these that should be done first? (Answers will vary. Some may argue that these four steps are listed in reverse order: we should first pray for our enemies, and then look for opportunities to do good to them. They will be blessed, and our own attitude toward them will change as we do this, to the point that we can actually love them.)
- Read Matthew 5:45-48. In the context of this passage, what does it mean to be “perfect”? (To love others with the same unselfish, sacrificing love that God extends to each of us.)
- We can also learn important lessons about overcoming evil with good by looking at how God has responded to sin:
  - Galatians 4:4. God’s response to evil has taken time; it was not an immediate “quick fix.”
John 5:30. God’s response to evil revealed His love and best interest for others, rather than for Himself.

John 12:48. God realizes that not everyone will appreciate or accept what He has done for them.

Acts 1:8. God expressed confidence in others (such as the disciples) that His work on their behalf would be effective and worth the effort.

**Tuesday (August 20): The Good Samaritan**

The parable of the good Samaritan is one of the best-known parables of Jesus, as it beautifully illustrates the principle of giving of yourself for the physical need of a stranger. It gives clear instructions in human compassion and responsibility, which break any social, economic, cultural religious or political barriers, with the purpose of bringing care for another human being.

**Discussion Questions**

- Read Luke 10:30-31. What decision does the priest make upon seeing the injured man? (He chooses to ignore the person.) What type of reasons could the priest use to ignore the injured person? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Luke 10:32. What decision does the Levite make when he sees the injured man? (He comes near and looks upon him but then chooses to leave him.) What types of reasoning could the Levite use to leave the man alone? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Luke 10:33-35. What decision does the Samaritan make upon seeing the injured man? (He decides to save his life and do all in his power to accomplish that.) What type of work and effort did the Samaritan demonstrate? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Luke 10:36, 37. What is Christ’s final instruction in the parable? (Go and do as the Samaritan did.) How can Christians become “good Samaritans” today instead of “priests” or “Levites”? (Answers will vary.)

**Wednesday (August 21): The Rich Man and Lazarus**

Several of Christ’s parables spoke directly to the seductive lure of money, and the dangers of yielding our lives to the service of money. In today’s lesson we will look more closely at these parables, and at the lessons for our lives that can be learned from them.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Read Luke 12:13-21 and Luke 16:19-24. What was, apparently, the great fault of the rich man in these parables? (His fault was in his disregard for the condition of the poor, and in his neglect to help them.)
- Read Luke 16:25. Will those who are rich in this world automatically be “punished” in the next life? Will those who are poor in this world automatically be blessed and prosperous in the next life? (No.) What makes the difference?
- Read 2 Peter 2:3. What does it mean to become “merchandise” to the power of money? (Letting it control our lives and our thoughts.) In what ways can both the rich and the poor become “merchandise” to the seductive lure of money? (The rich can easily become absorbed in holding onto their money, while the poor can easily become focused on...
becoming rich.) In what ways must we all be on guard so that money does not become the “root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:9,10) in our lives? (Answers will vary.)

- Read John 5:29 and Revelation 22:12. What important truth is emphasized in these verses? (There is a judgment, and the reward we receive will be based on our expressed faith in Christ, and on how that faith has been lived out in our life.)

Thursday (August 22): “The Least of These”

One of the aspects of the judgment of God upon which all should meditate is the illustration that Jesus gave revealing the results of the judgment. In Matthew 25:31-46 many find out too late that they were not found worthy to be in the presence of the Lord. Although they professed to be living a Christian life, they were found wanting. In today’s lesson we’ll look at the words of Jesus that appear to define our eternal life in relation to how we respond “to the least of these.”

Discussion Questions:

- Read Matthew 25:31-40. How does this passage show us what Christ is really searching for in us during the investigative judgment? (He is looking for those who truly love the Lord, confirmed by their works of love to others.) Is the idea of salvation by works here implied? (No. On the contrary, it shows that these Christians were so emptied of themselves, so full of Christ in their lives, that their works of love were not obvious to them. It was not as a reason to be saved that they did the works; it was the result of their faith in and love for Christ.)

- Read Matthew 25:41-46. How does this passage tell us the deception that the professed Christian will have while the investigative judgment is taking place? (Answers will vary.) How can people who “love” Christ actually be deceiving themselves? (Answers will vary.) How can this parable validate the concept of salvation by grace? (Answers will vary.)

Friday (August 23): Two Reasons to Show Mercy

In today’s lesson we look at two additional reasons to show mercy to others—first, because we are all children of God, and second, because ministry on the physical and emotional level provides wonderful opportunities to lead people into a saving relationship with, and faith in, Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions:

- Read Romans 10:12-13 and Galatians 3:28. What great truth is brought out in these verses? (All people are equal in Christ.) What implications does this have for Christians in our attitude and assistance toward those who are less fortunate? (Christians are called to live as Jesus did, and see in every person a son or daughter of God who deserves the blessings of this world, and the next.)

Christ tears away the wall of partition, the self-love, the dividing prejudice of nationality, and teaches a love for all the human family. He lifts men from the narrow circle that their selfishness prescribes; He abolishes all territorial lines and artificial distinctions of society. He makes no
difference between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. He teaches us to look upon every needy soul as our neighbor and the world as our field. {MB 42.2}

- Read Acts 15:6-9. What reason is revealed in this passage for the equal treatment of the Gentile believers? (So that their hearts may be purified by faith. Christ demonstrated a similar purpose in His miracles of healing [see Matthew 9:1-7].) As Christians today, what should be the ultimate goal of all our social outreach programs? (To bring people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, wherein they can live by faith in His word.) Is there ever a danger of losing sight of this goal and simply being satisfied with the physical help provided? (Answers will vary.)

- Read Acts 6:1-7. In spite of the many opportunities and obvious need for ministry in the social and physical realms, what was the primary focus of the apostles? (The preaching of God’s word.) What lessons and models for the church today can be gleaned from how the early church solved this dilemma? (Answers will vary. Some members of the church were given charge of the welfare ministry, while the apostles remained focused primarily on preaching the Word. The Holy Spirit led the early church to be able to care for both the physical and spiritual needs of the people.)

The standard of the golden rule is the true standard of Christianity; anything short of it is a deception. A religion that leads men to place a low estimate upon human beings, whom Christ has esteemed of such value as to give Himself for them; a religion that would lead us to be careless of human needs, sufferings, or rights, is a spurious religion. In slighting the claims of the poor, the suffering, and the sinful, we are proving ourselves traitors to Christ. It is because men take upon themselves the name of Christ, while in life they deny His character, that Christianity has so little power in the world. The name of the Lord is blasphemed because of these things. {MB 136.4}