

Lessons from Matthew 1-14

Application of Chapter 1

Many lessons can be drawn from this chapter. Some of the most important ones are: 1) God is in control of history and will bring His purposes to pass at the right time, as He did with the birth of Jesus “in the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4; cf. Rom 5:6). 2) Every part of the Bible is useful for our study—even passages that seem, on the surface, to have little relevance for us today. 3) Jesus understands us and can help us—because He is God, who knows all things and can do all things, and because He shares our human ancestry and experienced temptation from the cradle to the cross and was victorious over sin and death. This divine-human lineage uniquely qualifies Him as the one who can save us from our sins. 4) Finally, even clear commands of God that may seem, from a human perspective, to be difficult or even embarrassing to fulfill—such as Joseph taking Mary as his wife despite her not being pregnant by him—may be obeyed with the assurance that God will take care of the results.

“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.” (1 Timothy 1:15)

Application of Chapter 2

Some lessons that can be drawn from this chapter are:

The Scriptures are God’s clear and reliable means of communicating His will and purposes to us, though sometimes God communicates more directly (e.g., through dreams or visions). God’s communication both with Joseph, the son of David, and with wise foreigners seeking greater light shows that it is not our origins but our openness to God’s revelation and willingness to receive and act on it that counts (see DA 59, 62–63).

A partial, distorted knowledge of the Bible may be worse than no knowledge of it at all. The chief priests and scribes knew the place of Christ’s birth but, together with King Herod, were troubled at the news because it did not fit their expectations and this new, potentially disruptive, political power threatened their positions.

As prophecy is fulfilled, it testifies to “present truth”—the truth whose time has come in God’s advancing plan of salvation. Jesus as God’s Son, in fulfillment of prophecy, successfully recapitulates Israel’s history, thereby becoming their (and our) true Shepherd and King.

Application of Chapter 3

Some lessons that can be drawn from this chapter are:

It has been said that “God has no grandchildren, only children.” As Adventists, our physical heritage, even if we have grown up in the church and can trace our Adventist roots back many generations, means nothing without a living and genuine connection with God and His Word.

While no one can read the heart, the “fruit” we bear—the outward actions and lifestyle changes—indicate whether or not the Holy Spirit is working in our life. One of the reasons for the biblically based lifestyle standards we have as Seventh-day Adventists is as a visible indicator that a person has experienced conversion and is ready for baptism.

At every step and stage of life, Jesus is the perfect example for us (Matt 10:25; 16:24; 1 Pet 2:21; cf. John 13:15).

A work similar to that of John the Baptist has been given to God's last-day people to prepare the world for Christ's second coming (Matt 24:14; Rev 14:7–12; DA 101).

John's warning of judgment is an important encouragement for all of us, especially the leaders of God's church, to be awake and ready to meet the Coming One at His second advent (Matt 24:44; Luke 18:8; Rom 13:11).

Application of chapter 4

Victory Through Scripture: Jesus resisted temptation by quoting Scripture (Deuteronomy 8:3), demonstrating that the Word of God is the ultimate weapon against temptation and the primary sustenance for a believer's life.

Trust Over Appetite: The first temptation shows that true faith prioritizes obedience to God over meeting physical needs (bread) through one's own means.

The Nature of Temptation: Jesus' temptations in the wilderness were direct assaults on his identity as the Son of God, attempting to manipulate him into doubting God's provision, testing God, or seeking worldly power.

Total Dependence on God: Instead of using his divine power for selfish gain, Jesus lived as a human relying entirely on the Holy Spirit and the Father, setting an example for overcoming sin.

Immediate Discipleship: Jesus' call to his first disciples (fishermen) shows that following him requires immediate, total commitment, sometimes involving abandoning previous livelihoods.

Mission and Conflict: The chapter marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry, highlighting that his mission is to bring light to a dark world and reclaim authority from evil.

Application of Chapter 5

Important lessons contained in this chapter include:

Regardless of how difficult life might be now, those who are truly blessed have the principles of heaven in their hearts.

To be truly whole and truly healthy in every way includes having healthy thoughts.

It is humanly impossible to achieve the righteousness that God requires of all who will enter heaven. Only a miracle of God's forgiving grace that transforms willing believers more and more into His image by the Holy Spirit can make it possible.

Putting these principles into practice in daily life will help us not only to be more like Jesus but to understand Him better and to love Him more. "God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach" (DA 311).

"And He loves us though we err. Now do not worry yourself out of the arms of the dear Saviour, but rest trustingly in faith. He loves you; He cares for you; He is blessing you, and will give you His peace and grace. He is saying to you, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.'"

Ellen Gould White, *The Upward Look* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 212.

Application of Chapter 6

Important lessons contained in this chapter include:

Worshiping God is a deeply personal and private activity, even when ministering to the needs of others.

What matters in prayer, whether personal and private or in public, is not how much or how long we pray but remembering to whom we are praying and why.

What most consumes our discretionary time, money, and thoughts reveals what has captured our heart.

Since God knows our needs, rather than worrying about them, we should ask our heavenly Father to supply them and trust that He will.

Application of Chapter 7

Important lessons contained in this chapter include:

Spiritual discernment is important in order that we can do the most good, because there will be things (or people) to distract, discourage, or dissuade us from doing the Lord's work and practicing what is right.

The gist of Jesus' teachings on asking and seeking suggests that some effort and persistence may be necessary in order for our prayers to be answered and that we should not simply expect what we need to float down to us from heaven.

As God's children, one evidence of our faith in God and His Word is a determination to ask only for that which is in accordance with His will (1 John 5:14) and a willingness to surrender our will to His (Matt 6:10; 26:42).

Since the storms of life are unpredictable and usually come suddenly, it is a mark of wisdom to make investments in our spiritual future before trouble strikes. Like the building of a house that will stand the test of time, this may require the substantial expenditure of time and energy, but will prove in the end to have been worth it all.

"It is impossible for any mind to comprehend all the richness and greatness of even one promise of God. One catches the glory of one point of view, another the beauty and grace from another point, and the soul is filled with heavenly light. In them He is speaking to us individually.... It is in these promises that Christ communicates to us His grace and power."

Ellen G. White, *My Life Today* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 337.

Application of Chapter 8

Important lessons contained in this chapter include:

Just as Jesus ministered to all levels of society, so we are called to reach "every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Rev 14:6).

We must be careful not to repeat Israel's mistake of trusting that our knowledge of Scripture is adequate, or being proud of the light we have received. This increased

understanding makes us more accountable before God (Luke 12:47–48) and obligates us to share it with others (cf. Matt 5:14–16).

Jesus' words to the centurion about the power of faith (Matt 8:13) are just as applicable to us today. The unusual command form, "Let it be done" echoes the creation account (Gen 1:3, 6, 14, LXX), reminding us that "with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26). God may not always grant what we want. But if we ask in accordance with His will we can be assured of a positive answer in His time and way (1 John 5:14–15).

Jesus' healing ministry fulfills another of Isaiah's Servant Songs (Matt 8:17; cf. Isa 53:4). The biblical concept of healing, like that of human beings, is wholistic. Jesus came to heal us completely— physically, mentally, and spiritually. Like Jesus, we are called to minister to the whole person.

The fact that Jesus urged the disciples not to fear before rebuking the storm suggests that the real issue is not the circumstances themselves, but whether we look at them through the eyes of fear or faith. We should look at people the same way— with a view to their potential in light of God's power and grace.

Even when we meet with rejection, we may plant seeds for the gospel that will eventually result in a harvest of souls saved for God's kingdom.

Application of Chapter 9

Important lessons contained in this chapter include:

It is just as important to act on our faith as it is to believe. Thus we may encourage others' faith, just as the paralytic's friends did. Furthermore, if we fail to act on our faith we might legitimately question the strength of our faith and even whether we, in the biblical sense, really believe at all.

Since Jesus already knows our thoughts, we should not hesitate to share them honestly with God in prayer and trust in His willingness to help us be of greater usefulness in His service.

In light of Jesus' gentle rebuke to the Pharisees for not knowing the Scriptures well enough, what might He say to us as pastors, teachers, or church members regarding our knowledge of God and the Bible?

Jesus' ministry to the whole person is an example for Adventists to follow His method in all aspects of our labor for Him, whether in pastoral, medical, educational, or other lines.

Jesus encourages us not only to pray for the lost but also to pray for additional ways of reaching out to them, both as a church and as individuals.

No man can have the spirit and mind of Christ without being rendered better by it – in all relations and duties of life. - Ellen G. White, 4T 347

Application of Chapter 10

This chapter contains many practical lessons, including:

Ministers of the gospel are to be supported through the preaching of the message, because "the laborer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7, KJV; cf. 10:10). While self-evident, its application here is also based on the biblical principle of returning the tenth or "tithe" to

support the priests of the temple (Mal 3:10). Interestingly, Paul quotes Jesus' instructions to the apostles here as the basis for his teaching on the support of Christian ministers (1 Cor 9:11–14; 1 Tim 5:17–18).

When called upon to share our faith and defend what we believe, the promise is given that the Spirit of God, "your Father," will speak through us (Matt 10:20).

If by faith our eternal future is secure, then no adversity we experience now, including temptations we may face or suffering we may undergo in this life, can compare with the joy we will have of seeing our Savior face-to-face when He comes.

As the old hymn reminds us, "God will take care of you." Even the number of hairs on our head are known to Him, so we don't need to be afraid of what human beings can do to us (Matt 10:30; Ps 118:6). In fact, the safest place for us to be is in God's hands (cf. 2 Sam 24:14).

How we live our life, whether or not we openly "confess" Jesus so that people can tell that we are His followers, impacts our standing in the final judgment (Matt 10:32–33).

Showing kindness to genuine believers, even by so much as giving "a cup of cold water" (Matt 10:42) is a mark of belonging to God's kingdom and indicative of one's ultimately receiving the final "reward" of eternal life.

Application of Chapter 11

Among the lessons that may be gleaned from this chapter are the following:

Doubts may arise in the minds of even the most dedicated followers of Jesus, but this is no reason to be discouraged or lose hope. Instead, we should reexamine the reasons for our faith and the purpose for which God has raised us up as a church.

Just as Elijah was a model for John the Baptist, the two of them are models for us in connection with the message, life principles, and mission committed to us.

God's kingdom will triumph and—notwithstanding all the bad things that may happen, including the trials and suffering we may experience—we can rest in that assurance.

We need to take seriously the message of Jesus, not relying on our spiritual heritage or status as God's remnant people; otherwise, like many in Gideon's army, we may fall away when put to the test. Also, like the Jewish leaders and the Galilean towns that Jesus rebuked, some may not even realize the depth of their spiritual destitution.

The more childlike willingness to learn we have, the more we will learn from Jesus—both in terms of the truths of His kingdom and the humility and rest that characterize its citizens.

It is the Word of God alone that gives to us an authentic account of the creation of our world. ~Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 13

Application of Chapter 12

Important lessons gleaned from this chapter include:

Concerns over holiness and correct observance of the law should never trump human need. Rightly understood, they support each other.

Our understanding of Scripture can always grow and we should be careful not to allow our preconceived ideas to blind us to its real message.

Knowing God is everything—it is eternal life (John 17:3)—because His Word and presence will guide us safely and guard us from falsehood and deception.

Our words not only have the power to heal or to harm; they also reveal our heart's treasure and the present direction of our destiny.

Jesus' parable of the unclean spirit's return is a graphic warning against trifling with sin, because it prevents the infilling of the Holy Spirit and our belonging to Christ.

Remembering that Jesus experienced opposition from close friends and family can strengthen us when our faith is attacked or even ridiculed by those we love.

God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him. (MH 479)

All that has perplexed us in the providences of God will in the world to come be made plain. The things hard to be understood will then find explanation. The mysteries of grace will unfold before us. Where our finite minds discovered only confusion and broken promises, we shall see the most perfect and beautiful harmony. We shall know that infinite love ordered the experiences that seemed most trying (9T 286).

Application of chapter 13

Many valuable lessons may be gleaned from this chapter, including:

Understanding the truth (which is deeper than simply “knowing” it theoretically) is a gift of God, but we must first surrender our preconceived ideas; otherwise they will hinder us from being taught by the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; 16:13; cf. 6:45; 1 Cor 2:12–14).

Everyone must hear the gospel of the kingdom, regardless of its prospects, in harmony with Jesus' example as the preeminent Sower (parable of the sower and the seed).

The work of the kingdom is gradual but also will become widespread (like leaven working its way through the dough). It does not, however, point to an earthly millennium of peace but to the spread of the gospel proclamation “in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” with the second coming of Jesus (Matt 24:14, 30).

The kingdom begins small but eventually becomes great (parable of the mustard seed). So Christians, as members of this kingdom, humbly fulfill God's purposes now in service and will ultimately be exalted (Matt 23:11–12; 1 Pet 5:6) when it is established in glory.

The kingdom is more valuable than anything else (parable of the hidden treasure; parable of the pearl of great price).

Only in the judgment will the wicked be weeded out (parable of the wheat and tares; parable of the net).

The time of the judgment is left vague: “at the end of the age/world” (Matt 13:39–40, 49).

Faithfulness to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and instructing others in them accurately is stressed by Jesus as foundational to “every scribe”—every church teacher, pastor, leader (the disciplined scribe).

Application of Chapter 14

Many valuable lessons may be gleaned from this chapter, including:

Unbelief is dangerously self-reinforcing, leading people to focus on evidence that supports their doubts and to ignore evidence that would lead to faith.

John humbly submitted to whatever future God had for him. “God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him.”

Just as Jesus challenged the faith of His disciples in commanding them to do what would otherwise be impossible, so we are encouraged to believe that what would ordinarily be impossible in our own strength to accomplish is possible with God (Matt 21:21; Luke 18:27; Rom 4:21; 2 Cor 10:4–5). It is good to remember in challenging situations that the commonsense solution, the solution requiring no faith, may not be the solution God has in mind.

When faced with extraordinarily difficult situations or when obeying God seems downright impossible, it's worth contemplating Peter's faith and witness. If Jesus wants us to do something He will enable us to do it (Matt 17:20). If Jesus wants us to do something, He will enable us to do it. “As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings.”

The disciples' terrifying struggle in the boat and Peter's experience of walking on water illustrate the importance of faith when trouble comes. As a popular song by Don Moen reminds us, “God will make a way where there seems to be no way.” That “way” may not always be so immediate; it may take months or even years to discern. But trusting God will sustain us in the trials we face. And then the winds will cease.