

***“The Least of These”*: Ministering to Those in Need**

Living the Advent Hope

Lesson #11 for September 14, 2019

Scriptures: Luke 18:1-8; Matthew 24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19,58; Ecclesiastes 8:14; 12:1-14; Revelation 21:1-5; 22:1-5.

1. This lesson will discuss how Seventh-day Adventist Christians should be spending their time as they are preparing for the second coming.
2. The book of Matthew, in particular, speaks of the kingdom of heaven involving not only things which happen on this earth in the here and now, but also what will happen in the future glorious kingdom of God in heaven and, later, back on this earth made new.

Matthew 10:5-8: ⁵ These twelve men were sent out by Jesus with the following instructions: “Do not go to any Gentile territory or any Samaritan towns. ⁶Instead, you are to go to the lost sheep of the people of Israel. ⁷Go and preach, ‘The Kingdom of heaven is near!’ ⁸Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases, and drive out demons. You have received without paying, so give without being paid.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Matthew 10:5-8). New York: American Bible Society.

3. Almost immediately after discussing the choosing of the twelve disciples, why did Matthew talk about Jesus sending them out to Galilee to preach, “The kingdom of heaven is near!” and to heal the sick, raise the dead back to life, and drive out demons. What did Jesus mean when He said in this passage, “The kingdom of heaven is near”?
4. Some have referred to the kingdom of God on this earth as the *kingdom of grace*. Does healing the sick, bringing the dead back to life, and even driving out demons mean a kingdom of grace is here? See *The Great Controversy* 347.0-347.1.
5. But, later in His ministry, (John 18:36) Jesus also said that His kingdom was “not of this world.” So, how are we to put these two statements together? Jesus was trying to get us to recognize that following His example on this earth is the best way to prepare for the kingdom of glory that is coming. Whether we like it or not, we live in a world that is in a mess. God has placed us here to help carry out His mission to spread the gospel to the entire world.
6. From the day that Adam and Eve sinned and were expelled from the Garden of Eden, the human race has hoped for a better day. Some have been in slavery, exile, oppression, poverty, or innumerable other injustices and tragedies. And since we believe that God has the power to intervene, the cry has been: “How long, Lord before you do something?”
7. Try to imagine what kind of prayers were offered by the slaves in Egypt, the Israelite exiles in Babylon, and many other similar situations that could be mentioned. Is God ignoring our problems? God is waiting for us! (2 Peter 3:9-12)
8. Some might be tempted to believe that our prayers never reach God’s throne. But, even the blood of the martyrs was/is crying out, and that cry was/is being heard in the throne room of God in heaven.
9. **Revelation 5:9-10:** ⁹ Then the Lamb broke open the fifth seal. I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed because they had proclaimed God’s word and had been faithful in their witnessing. ¹⁰They shouted in a loud voice, “Almighty Lord, holy and true! How long will it be until you judge the people on earth and punish them for killing us?”—*Good News Bible*.*

10. At this point in history, it may be impossible for us to fully understand why God tells us that these trials are the best preparation we can have for what is coming. Does it make sense to you to hear that the time of trouble ahead of us is the best preparation for a time when there will be no troubles? How can that be? The great controversy must be concluded.
11. From the very beginning of his rebellion in heaven, Lucifer/Satan has claimed that he could run a better universe than God does. He firmly believes that given complete freedom, everyone would choose to be as selfish as he is. But, God says that is not true. There have been and there will be in the future a significant group of people who will live loving lives because that is the best way to live. Satan denies that and does not believe that it will ever be possible. So, as a last step in the “war” we call *the great controversy*, God will allow Satan to have near complete control of things on this earth so the entire universe can see what it would be like to have Satan in control! God cannot bring things to an end without that.

Zechariah 1:12: Then the angel said, “Almighty LORD, you have been angry with Jerusalem and the cities of Judah for seventy years now. How much longer will it be before you show them mercy?”—*Good News Bible*.*

12. Zechariah and Haggai, the Old Testament minor prophets, were struggling to get a discouraged group of Israelites who had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Even when the foundation was laid, some of the senior citizens who had seen the former temple built by Solomon wept as they realized how small this new temple was. And so, Zechariah cried out: “How much longer will it be before You show them mercy?”
13. Even in the very successful days of David while expanding his kingdom and writing many of what is now included in the Psalms, there were many of them bemoaning with laments about the apparent prosperity and good fortune of the wicked while the righteous are abused, exploited, and poor. What is behind those laments?

Psalms 94:3-7: ³ How much longer will the wicked be glad?

How much longer, LORD?

⁴ How much longer will criminals be proud
and boast about their crimes?

⁵ They crush your people, LORD;
they oppress those who belong to you.

⁶ They kill widows and orphans,
and murder the strangers who live in our land.

⁷ They say, “The LORD does not see us;
the God of Israel does not notice.”—*Good News Bible*.*

14. People who do not believe in the omnipotence of God may feel that injustice, poverty, and trouble are just a natural part of living on this earth. But, for people who believe in an Almighty God who could prevent such problems, there is a tendency to repeat the words of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk 1:2: O LORD, how long must I call for help before you listen, before you save us from violence?—*Good News Bible*.*

15. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul recognized that all creation was groaning with pain like the pains of childbirth because of the evil in our world. But, God has not forgotten, and He is not ignoring the problem.

Romans 8:19-22: ¹⁹All of creation waits with eager longing for God to reveal his

children.²⁰For creation was condemned to lose its purpose, not of its own will, but because God willed it to be so. Yet there was the hope²¹that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God.²²For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth.—*Good News Bible*.*

16. As recorded in Luke 18:1-8, even Jesus gave a rather surprising parable about an unjust judge. Jesus answered: “Will God not judge in favour of his own people who cry to him day and night for help?”—*Good News Bible*.* He will do so quickly.
17. Sometimes, Christians lay themselves open to being accused of being “so other-worldly-minded that they are of no earthly good.” While Christians who firmly believe in the promises of Scripture and the second coming should find those promises a ray of hope, that does not mean that they are free to sit back and relax and do nothing here and now. Sometimes, powerful people have told the poor just to accept their sad conditions because Jesus will come back soon and make it right!
18. Review Matthew 24&25. These two chapters are a part of the sermon that Jesus gave on the Mount of Olives after His last day in the temple. He had made a startling statement to His disciples earlier, saying that not one stone would be left upon another. (Matthew 24:2) The disciples were most anxious to find out what He meant by that. But, instead of specifically talking only about the destruction of Jerusalem, He mixed the discussion of that event with the discussion of the events at the second coming. Jesus went on to describe how false christs and false prophets would come and deceive, if possible, the very elect. In fact, things will become so bad that He said in Matthew 24:22: “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive.” (NIV*) What did He mean by that?
19. But, it is very important to notice that Christ went directly on to speak as recorded in Matthew 25. And what are we supposed to be doing in light of those predicted events? Matthew began with talking about the **parable of the ten virgins**. What are we to learn from that parable? We need to be filling our vessels full of the oil of the Holy Spirit. This takes place as we study our Bibles and pray and fill our minds with the truths of Scripture.

Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; **they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great [594] conflict.** To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God’s immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 593.2-594.0.†

20. Jesus then went on to talk about the **parable of the talents**. This parable clearly suggests that there is no time to bury our talents and to do nothing with them. Everyone needs to be using whatever talent or talents he has to promote the kingdom of God.
21. And finally, Jesus talked about **the final judgment**. And what was His conclusion?
Matthew 25:45: “The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me.’”—*Good News Bible*.*

And the judgment seems to turn on this particular point. What have we done here in “The Least of These”: Ministering to Those in Need #11 - page 3 of 6

this life to help the poor and needy and the uninformed about the future kingdom? So, what should be our role each day? Do we believe the words of Jesus?

22. It is clear from the history of the early Christian church that from the deep depression and the discouragement that the disciples felt after the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, there was a complete transformation starting from resurrection Sunday through the rest of the New Testament. But, there is no reason, at this point in time, for us to be disappointed and discouraged.

1 Corinthians 15:22-23: ²²For just as all people die because of their union with Adam, in the same way all will be raised to life because of their union with Christ. ²³But each one will be raised in the right order: Christ, first of all; then, at the time of his coming, those who belong to him.—*Good News Bible*.*

23. The resurrection of Jesus Christ into newness of life is the Christian's promise that God can do the same thing for us. Consider what Paul wrote if, in fact, there is or will be no resurrection from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19: ¹² Now, since our message is that Christ has been raised from death, how can some of you say that the dead will not be raised to life? ¹³If that is true, it means that Christ was not raised; ¹⁴and if Christ has not been raised from death, then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe. ¹⁵More than that, we are shown to be lying about God, because we said that he raised Christ from death—but if it is true that the dead are not raised to life, then he did not raise Christ. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is a delusion and you are still lost in your sins. ¹⁸It would also mean that the believers in Christ who have died are lost. ¹⁹If our hope in Christ is good for this life only and no more, then we deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world.—*Good News Bible*.*

24. Is it true that living a Christian life here and now is "pitiful"? I certainly do not see that at all. I firmly believe that anyone who fully understands the gospel would choose to live a Christian life here and now even if there were no future reward!

25. Review in your mind the stages of change that took place in the lives, attitudes, and outlooks of the disciples starting on Resurrection Sunday up through Pentecost.

Acts 2:1-4: When the day of Pentecost came, all the believers were gathered together in one place. ²Suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³**Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there.** ⁴**They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

26. Soon, the disciples were going out to spread the gospel to anyone who would listen, and they were not afraid even to die.

1 Corinthians 15:30-31: And as for us—why would we run the risk of danger every hour? ³¹My brothers and sisters, I face death every day! The pride I have in you, in our life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord, makes me declare this.—*Good News Bible*.*

27. Many examples could be given of Christian martyrs who have received treatment that they did not deserve. Sometimes, it seems like the wicked are successful and the righteous are

punished or unrewarded. And what will be the final answer to all of that?

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: ¹³ After all this, there is only one thing to say: have reverence for God, and obey his commands, because this is all that human beings were created for. ¹⁴God is going to judge everything we do, whether good or bad, even things done in secret.—*Good News Bible*.*

28. Bible-believing Christians base their faith on their understanding of (1) God and His character, (2) the nature of life and death, and (3) the world in which we live. It certainly was not God's plan for our world to go through all of this. But, God's judgment will get it all straight and correct in the end. That should be good news for God's friends.
29. Read Revelation 21:1-5 and Revelation 22:1-5. It is beyond our power to imagine the future world.

1 Corinthians 2:9: ⁹However, as the scripture says:

“What no one ever saw or heard,
what no one ever thought could happen,
is the very thing God prepared for those who love him.”—*Good News Bible*.*

30. It may be very hard for us to imagine in the troubled, scarred, tragic world in which we live what it would be like to be in heaven. Ellen White assured us that we will spend the rest of eternity explaining to the rest of the universe what salvation has meant to us.
31. But, meanwhile, still down here on this earth, we need to be doing everything we can through every means we can to reach out to those who are still hurting and need to hear the gospel. We know that things will only get worse as we approach the second coming.

When the voice of God turns the captivity of His people, there is a terrible awakening of those who have lost all in the great conflict of life. While probation continued they were blinded by Satan's deceptions, and they justified their course of sin. The rich prided themselves upon their superiority to those who were less favored; but they had obtained their riches by violation of the law of God. They had neglected to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to deal justly, and to love mercy.... They have sold their souls for earthly riches and enjoyments, and have not sought to become rich toward God. The result is, their lives are a failure; their pleasures are now turned to gall, their treasures to corruption.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 654.1.

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.—*The Great Controversy** 678.3.

32. We have been assured that God will not allow evil to continue forever.
33. So, how are we spending the time we have left here on this earth? What motivates you to reach out to the poor and needy? And to share the gospel? And share the love of God?
34. Jesus was the greatest Teacher who ever lived on this earth. Why is it that He could not get His disciples to understand, or even get the message to John the Baptist, of the truth about His kingdom on this earth? John the Baptist clearly misunderstood. (See Matthew 3:1-12 and Matthew 11:2-6.) And so did Jesus's disciples. (See **Luke 18:31-34**.)

Like the Saviour's disciples, John the Baptist did not understand the nature of

Christ's kingdom. He expected Jesus to take the throne of David; and as time passed, and the Saviour made no claim to kingly authority, John become perplexed and troubled.... Like the prophet Elijah, in whose spirit and power he had come to Israel, he looked for the Lord to reveal Himself as a God that answereth by fire.... And now from his dungeon he [John] watched for the Lion of the tribe of Judah to cast down the pride of the oppressor, and to deliver the poor and him that cried. But Jesus seemed to content Himself with gathering disciples about Him, and healing and teaching the people. He was eating at the tables of the publicans, while every day the Roman yoke rested more heavily upon Israel, while King Herod and his vile paramour worked their will, and the cries of the poor and suffering went up to heaven.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 215.2-3.†

35. There are many examples in the New Testament of Christ reaching out to people who were hurting, touching their lives and making them better. Review Mark 5:21-42 with the stories of Jesus's healing of Jairus's daughter and healing of the woman who touched His garment. Why not today? Read Luke 19:1-10; and think of the story of Zacchaeus in Jericho.

It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence. Yet enough may be understood concerning both the origin and the final disposition of sin to make fully manifest the justice and benevolence of God in all His dealings with evil. Nothing is more plainly taught in [493] Scripture than that God was in no wise responsible for the entrance of sin; that there was no arbitrary withdrawal of divine grace, no deficiency in the divine government, that gave occasion for the uprising of rebellion. Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin. Our only definition of sin is that given in the word of God; it is "the transgression of the law;" it is the outworking of a principle at war with the great law of love which is the foundation of the divine government.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 492.2-493.0.

36. The great controversy is raging on. It is impossible for us to understand Satan's motives and actions. But, we have the good news that God understands all and will bring the whole thing to a conclusion one day. We must place ourselves on God's side and not on Satan's side.

1 John 3:8: Whoever continues to sin belongs to the Devil, because the Devil has sinned from the very beginning. The Son of God appeared for this very reason, to destroy what the Devil had done.—*Good News Bible*.*

37. In this lesson we have the suggestion that Adventists need to be careful:

To avoid two extremes: (1) *overexcitement* about our expectancy of Christ's second coming that writes off the present world as doomed, and therefore militates against our putting forth any effort into working for the good of the society in which we live; and (2) *indifference* to Christ's advent that makes the present world the main focus for which to live and work. For these indifferent ones, the present world is not a *waiting room* to the coming world, but a *living room* to occupy comfortably in a relaxed manner.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 148. [Italic type is in the Bible Study Guide.]‡

38. Which room are you in?

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