

The Gospel in Action



Week Eleven

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Matthew 25:31–46



See videos at
www.inverseible.org/SDAH11-a

PRESSING SOCIETAL ISSUES

Early Adventist pioneers were so involved with the abolitionist movement that to be an Adventist also meant being an abolitionist. Only a misunderstanding of our history would lead someone to say today's church should avoid the societal issues that impact our communities.

The first GC president, John Byington, used his farm as a stop on the Underground Railroad, helping slaves escape to the free North. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* was banned in the South due to the strong anti-slavery stance its articles took. James White, J.N. Andrews, J.N. Loughborough, and Uriah Smith all strongly denounced the U.S. government for condoning both slavery and the treatment of free African Americans.

Ellen White advocated for breaking the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which required people to return escaped slaves to their masters even if they were in a free state (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 [1855], 201). She also believed the church should disfellowship people who sympathized with the slave institution so that the church's reputation might be protected (*Ibid.*, 359). Our early pioneers were counter-cultural not only in their beliefs about the Sabbath and the sanctuary but also in areas of biblically supported societal reforms. The church later got involved in the temperance movement, which advocated for alcohol to be banned.

This brief overview of our history depicts a church that was wholistic in both theology and practicality. It's important to learn from our spiritual predecessors to see how we can identify, adapt, and apply biblically mandated principles to our own lives.



inScribe

Write out Matthew 25:31–46 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out a portion of the primary passage. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

How does the parable of the sheep and goats teach us to get ready for Jesus' second coming?

How can we move beyond helping people just because we want others to notice?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/SDAH11-3

REBELLION VERSUS CHRISTIAN CONVICTION

As our early pioneers looked forward to Jesus' return, they recognized that they were already living in the time of judgment during which every person will be called to give account of their lives before God. Regarding the cruelty of the slave trade in light of the judgment, Ellen White wrote, "All heaven beholds with indignation human beings, the workmanship of God, reduced by their fellow men to the lowest depths of degradation and placed on a level with the brute creation.... Angels have recorded it all; it is written in the book. The tears of the pious bondmen and bondwomen, of fathers, mothers, and children, brothers and sisters, are all bottled up in heaven" (*Early Writings* [1882], 275). Their belief in Jesus' soon return and God's imminent judgments motivated them to oppose American slavery. Though it was a very tense period in U.S. history that of course erupted into a bloody civil war in the 1860s, our early pioneers were unswerving in their public criticism of the slave trade. For Adventist pioneers, slavery was evidence that although America was full of Christians who went to church every week, it was also being driven by the wrong spirit.

While slavery existed, Adventists confronted the issue with a call to repent and repair what was broken. Ellen White even advocated breaking the law of the land in helping slaves escape when possible. In the 1890s, after slavery had been abolished, Ellen White wrote *The Southern Work*, a book that called the church to serve emancipated slaves. In the 1890s, the United States was a most unwelcoming mission field, with racial hostility sparking violence and injustice against people of color. White people who started schools or other facilities for blacks were also targeted. At age 44, in the midst of all this tension and violence, Ellen White's wayward son, Edson, converted and felt convicted to respond to the need in the south. Risking everything, Edson moved south to help pioneer the gospel work amongst the recently freed slaves by establishing schools, publishing houses, and churches throughout the region.

Those who got involved in helping the downtrodden were following the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples in His last sermon, recorded in Matthew 25. Beginning in the previous chapter, this message was an answer to a question the disciples had asked: "What will be the sign of Your coming?" (24:3). Chapter 25 has three parables, each related to the Second Coming in some way. First is the parable of the ten virgins, which we looked at in lesson one. It talks about the personal preparation needed for Christ's return. This is followed by the parable of the talents, which places emphasis on the importance of laboring for others' salvation.

The last parable, in which the King separates the wicked goats from the righteous sheep, explains in a simple and practical way the criteria by which we will be judged. Our active ministry will profit us little if it has not been authentic and selfless, always seeking the good of society's downtrodden. So much of today's religious activity (cont. on p. 93)⁹¹

BACK TO BASICS

The parable of the sheep and goats begins with judgment language: we see a throne, and the sheep and goats are physically separated from each other. These animals represent all nations, not just one area of the world, and they're gathered before the Son of Man in a typification of the final judgment on the earth. A clear distinction is drawn between the sheep on the right hand, signifying honor and blessing, and the goats on the left, indicating disfavor.

Verses 34–36 outline the reward given to the righteous—inheriting the kingdom—and then explain why they're granted the inheritance. This passage lists six examples of practical service they've done: feeding the hungry, providing drink to the thirsty, taking in the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and visiting those in prison. However, in verses 37–39, the righteous answer in bewilderment, wondering when they did all those things.

Today's world is saturated with social media, the goal of many is to get more likes, comments, and followers or subscribers—where good deeds are often recorded and posted with the intention of “influencing” others to do good as well. While broadcasting good deeds can have a positive influence, the fact remains that public displays of benevolence are often motivated by the hope of gaining attention.

The beauty of this parable is that the righteous don't even know what they've done to deserve a reward. It's such a regular part of their lives that they no longer think about it—they've simply been responding automatically to others' needs. To answer their question in verses 37–39, Jesus compares Himself to those in need, the lowest of society, declaring that when we serve them, we have served Him. Similarly, those who ignored those in need ignored Jesus. Too often our society values serving people of importance while ignoring the lowest classes, but through this parable, Jesus flips that whole mindset.

The importance of serving is reiterated in *The Desire of Ages*: “When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering.” (Ellen White [1898], 637).



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

How can we find a balance between posting about the work we're doing for God to influence and inspire others and posting to gain attention and shed light on how good we are?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/SDAH11-4

inSpect



What relationship do the following verses have with Matthew 25:31–46?

1 John 4:7

Matthew 7:12

Proverbs 24:11

Matthew 7:21–23

Matthew 5:43–48

Micah 6:8

John 13:35

Galatians 6:2

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

Review your memorized verse from Matthew 25:31–46.

(Cont. from inGest, p. 91):

is public. People often seek outward acknowledgment, but this is not the kind of service Jesus looks for. Both groups in the parable of the sheep and the goats were surprised that their service or lack of service was even noticed. The people represented by the goats were not expecting to be condemned by their neglect of seemingly unimportant people, and those represented by the sheep were not expecting to be rewarded for the ways they helped the outcasts of society, for they didn't do it to gain public favor.

(Cont. from inSight, p. 95):

to be left to committees or organized charities. Individual responsibility, individual effort, personal sacrifice, is the requirement of the gospel" (*The Ministry of Healing* [1905], 147).

BEING COUNTERCULTURAL

Our love for God is manifested in how we love those around us. Jesus’ work and ministry highlight this truth as He was the epitome of selfless love for others. This parable in Matthew 25 is a recognition of those who truly serve God by doing what Jesus did. There are numerous descriptions of Jesus spending time with various socially despised people groups in an effort to teach His disciples what true service is. Jesus’ followers emulate this behavior, but it’s such an intrinsic part of who they are that they do it without realizing the significance of their actions.

Jesus went further than just ministering to outcasts. Christ identified Himself with them so closely that He declared that however we treat these outcasts is how we have treated Him. Here Jesus stands out as a countercultural God, likening Himself to the poor, sick, imprisoned, hungry, thirsty, and naked. This is so different to the way almost every earthly leader sees themselves since achieving status means escaping the drudgery and stigma of poverty, but Jesus sees no shame in identifying Himself with this people group.

Christ did these countercultural things so often that people drew conclusions about His character, and His followers are to serve in the same culturally radical way. We are to engage with the downtrodden so often that it becomes an integral part of who we are. When the day of judgment comes and all the professionalism, hierarchy, structure, and organization of this world are swept away, God will look for those who have shown genuine, selfless service to others.

It’s often said that we can tell who someone is by who they spend time with. Some of us try to make friends with people above us on the social or corporate ladder to get ahead and improve our self-esteem. In trying to advance our careers, education, and financial aspirations, we often seek out mentors who are more successful. Jesus isn’t against any of us being successful in life, but this parable redefines true success. For Jesus, success was about serving others. The mission statement for His whole life centered around service: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). The most valuable mentors are those who teach us how to successfully live a life of devotion to God and service to others.

Service for those in need rarely results in an immediate conversion, but this is possibly exactly why Jesus placed so much emphasis on it. Our true motives in serving are laid bare. Are we doing it to get attention or notoriety, or are we doing it out of love—for no earthly gain whatsoever? Put simply, Jesus came to earth because He *is* love, and the saved will demonstrate this same characteristic because they’ll reflect who Jesus is.



inVite

Meditate on the primary passage again and look for where Jesus is.



What is true success in God’s eyes?

How can we be sure we’re serving for the right reasons even if we’re praised or rewarded for that service?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you personally through these texts?

Prayer Response:



Read more at www.inverseible.org/SDAH11-6



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

After this week's study of
the chapter, what are some
personal applications you are
convicted of in your life?

What are some practical
applications you must
make in your school, family,
workplace, and church life?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
www.inverseible.org/SDAH11-7

FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS

"When you doled out the pittance of bread to the starving poor, when you gave those flimsy garments to shield them from the biting frost, did you remember that you were giving to the Lord of glory? All the days of your life I was near you in the person of these afflicted ones, but you did not seek Me. You would not enter into fellowship with Me. I know you not.

"Many feel that it would be a great privilege to visit the scenes of Christ's life on earth, to walk where He trod, to look upon the lake beside which He loved to teach, and the hills and valleys on which His eyes so often rested. But we need not go to Nazareth, to Capernaum, or to Bethany, in order to walk in the steps of Jesus. We shall find His footprints beside the sickbed, in the hovels of poverty, in the crowded alleys of the great city, and in every place where there are human hearts in need of consolation. In doing as Jesus did when on earth, we shall walk in His steps.

"All may find something to do. 'The poor always ye have with you,' (John 12:8), Jesus said, and none need feel that there is no place where they can labor for Him. Millions upon millions of human souls ready to perish, bound in chains of ignorance and sin, have never so much as heard of Christ's love for them. Were our condition and theirs to be reversed, what would we desire them to do for us? All this, so far as lies in our power, we are under the most solemn obligation to do for them. Christ's rule of life, by which every one of us must stand or fall in the judgment, is, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' Matthew 7:12.

"The Saviour has given His precious life in order to establish a church capable of caring for sorrowful, tempted souls. A company of believers may be poor, uneducated, and unknown; yet in Christ they may do a work in the home, the neighborhood, the church, and even in 'the regions beyond,' whose results shall be as far-reaching as eternity.

"It is because this work is neglected that so many young disciples never advance beyond the mere alphabet of Christian experience. The light which was glowing in their own hearts when Jesus spoke to them, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' they might have kept alive by helping those in need. The restless energy that is so often a source of danger to the young might be directed into channels through which it would flow out in streams of blessing. Self would be forgotten in earnest work to do others good." (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* [1898], 640.)

"Everywhere there is a tendency to substitute the work of organizations for individual effort. Human wisdom tends to consolidation, to centralization, to the building up of great churches and institutions. Multitudes leave to institutions and organizations the work of benevolence; they excuse themselves from contact with the world, and their hearts grow cold. They become self-absorbed and unimpressible. Love for God and man dies out of the soul. Christ commits to His followers an individual work,—a work that cannot be done by proxy. Ministry to the sick and the poor, the giving of the gospel to the lost, is not (cont. on p. 93)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



What criteria does Jesus use to separate the nations when He judges?

What do we learn about Jesus' character from Him identifying Himself so closely with the lowest people of society?

What are some things that cause us to be distant from the very people we are called to minister to?

How can we navigate around the challenges that might prevent us from ministering to the needy?

Edson White's conversion led him to minister in one of the most challenging areas of his time. How should we respond when we see a very challenging mission field?

What motives should we have when we serve? What should we do when we realize we're serving for the wrong reasons?