

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
Second Quarter 2016: *The Book of Matthew*
Lesson 5 “The Seen *and* the Unseen War”

Read for this week’s study

Matthew 11:11, 12; Revelation 5:5; Matthew 12:25–29; Isaiah 27:1; Matthew 11:1–12; Hebrews 2:14.

Memory Text

“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.” (Matthew 11:12, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Matthew 11:11, 12
- III. The Frontiers of Darkness
- IV. The “Warfare Worldview”
- V. When the Battle Gets Nasty
- VI. A Lost Cause
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “The great controversy between Christ and Satan forms the unseen background to the world of the seen that we experience every day. This week we will examine texts from Matthew (and elsewhere) that help to reveal these unseen forces and how they impact our lives, and choices, here.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. “Some have argued that the most likely interpretation of Matthew 11:12 is to apply the most common uses of *biazomai* (typically positive) and *biastes* (typically negative), giving us this interpretation: the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing with ‘holy power and magnificent energy that has been pushing back the frontiers of darkness’; and while this is happening, ‘violent or rapacious men have been trying to plunder it.’—D. A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary With the New International Version: Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 266, 267. (Monday’s lesson)
3. “This interpretation appears to ring true to the wider gospel of Matthew. In fact, this interpretation also captures the bigger picture, that of the struggle between light and darkness, between Christ and Satan, a theme that permeates the Bible but is made explicit in the New Testament. There is indeed a war, seen and unseen, in which we are all involved, in which we all take a side, in which we all experience

every day, regardless of how much we do or do not understand what's going on. This is what living amid the great controversy is all about." (Monday's lesson)

4. Jesus began to announce the presence of the kingdom precisely when John the Baptist was put in prison. The violent opposition against 'the kingdom of heaven' is already seen in the arrest and imprisonment of its herald, John, and more ominously foreshadowed in the growing opposition to Jesus himself.
5. But when Jesus says that John was 'Elijah – the one who was to come,' Jesus echoes what John said in his opening question (11:3): "Are you the one who is to come?" Jesus is saying: "No – that's you! You are the man of fire, the Elijah person; I am the one who comes after the Elijah-person!" Jesus sees himself not in terms of Elijah calling down fire from heaven, but in terms of Isaiah 35 as one restoring Israel rather than judging and condemning. Just as wicked people do not like the message of judgment, because they think (rightly) that it is aimed at them, often good people do not like the message of mercy, because they think (wrongly) that people are going to get away with wickedness.
6. Who put John in prison? Herod Antipas. Who did Herod think he was? King of the Jews. Who did John hope Jesus might be? The true king of the Jews. What would have happened if Herod had heard that Jesus was a rival king of the Jews? Jesus would have been just another prisoner, perhaps another decapitated prisoner. Therefore Jesus teases the crowds into thinking harder about who John was – and therefore, who Jesus himself must be. John was not like Herod, the royalty they knew. (The picture on Herod's coins was a reed waving in the wind.) John was a prophet, dressed like Elijah, eating like Elijah and preaching like Elijah. But Jesus is a Messiah who does not want to force himself on people. He is the King of a different type of kingdom! Even today, people are usually not impressed with the workings of Jesus' followers and representatives. They much prefer Elijah's and John the Baptist's style!
7. "[The Bible] depicts a struggle, a battle and—as we know from other Bible texts—this battle is, at the core, the one between Christ and Satan. [...] One contemporary (non-Adventist) theologian has called [it] the 'Warfare Worldview,' the idea that there is a battle going on between supernatural powers in the cosmos, a warfare in which we are all in one way or another involved. This notion, of course, is not new to Seventh-day Adventists. It has been part of our theology from the earliest days of our church; indeed, our pioneers held to it even before our church itself was officially formed." (Tuesday's lesson) Why is this model of interpretation so crucial for a proper understanding of the Bible?
8. "For starters, whom do we think inspired the leaders to put John in jail? We can see here Satan's attempt to not only stop John but to discourage faith in Jesus. [...] There's no question that Satan could have made the followers of Jesus and John ask themselves the question: If this Jesus of Nazareth can do so many wonderful things, and has so much power, then why is He letting such a faithful and good man as John, His cousin, rot in jail?" (Wednesday's lesson)

9. “Also, whom do we think was putting the doubts in John’s head? Why am I here? Why doesn’t He free me? Hence, no wonder he asked, “‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’” (Matthew 11:3, NKJV).” (Wednesday’s lesson)
10. While there is no question that according to the Bible, Satan is a personal being, is it healthy to attribute everything that is happening, every thought or doubt to him? How does he often work (Genesis 3:1-6)? How much was John’s doubt the result of his thoughts and operating system (cf. Job’s friends)? What about the models in our heads?
11. King Herod objected to John’s fiery preaching and particularly to his denunciation of him for marrying his brother’s ex-wife. For John, Herod was not the real king, so God would soon replace him. It’s no wonder Herod put him in prison! But now John is disappointed. He expected Jesus to be a man of fire, an Elijah-type of character, who would sweep through Israel as Elijah had dealt with the prophets of Baal. He expected Jesus to confront Herod, drive him away from his throne, become king in Herod’s palace and get his cousin out of prison (see Luke 4:18)—and give him a place of honor. It was not Satan, but the plain reading of the Bible that got John into trouble!
12. But Jesus was going around befriending tax collectors and sinners, and gaining a reputation not for what John expected him to do, but for being a friend of people who were outsiders and a friend to those who did not keep the Torah strictly and properly. Jesus was not thinking of himself in terms of Elijah calling fire down from heaven, but in terms of Isaiah 35, bringing the end of the exile by healing the blind and lame, setting God’s people free at last (though not necessarily from a physical prison).
13. In light of Jesus’ messianic mission, what must the heart of the church’s work be today? Is it possible that even today many Christians will misunderstand this? And of course, many in the world may misunderstand it as well. Jesus shows that this is God’s true story and He invokes a special blessing on people who understand this (and a warning to those who are puzzled by it, like John). Are we offended when God is doing something different from what we expected? Isn’t being part of God’s story the most important thing?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Graham: Abraham’s relationship with God—why, they were two of the best friends in all history! Abraham knew God well. He had had long experience with God. When God asked him to do things before, it had always worked out well and it made sense. So there was no *blind* faith on Abraham’s part. God asked him to do something that puzzled him a great deal. At the moment he couldn’t understand. But he said, “God, if it is you saying it (and I know you so well) I know this will make sense and there will be some solution, so I’m on my way.” This kind of faith is saying, “God, I’m on my way, but may I ask you why?” And so on the way, he asked why.

And as he thought it through, he thought, the one who gave me this son miraculously is well able to resurrect my son. Or maybe he will provide a substitute. And Hebrews says he was right. So instead of that being blind faith, I would say he knew God well enough to go—and to know that there would be a solution that would make sense. And so it did.

Lou: But there was in that experience an element of uncertainty. That is to say, how will it work out? There was pain, certainly.

Graham: He wondered.

Lou: Yes. So faith can include that kind of thing.

Graham: Because God is so trustworthy, we are willing to obey him when he asks us to do something beyond our present understanding. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #3 with Lou Venden, “All God Asks Is Trust” recorded January, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/3MMCAG>*

Lou: You’ve talked about trust and faith. You alluded to this again tonight. But I think many of us still have that feeling that faith involves this kind of blind trust. You need faith when you don’t have enough evidence, so you just go ahead and believe. I wish you’d comment a bit more about that. We need to get that nailed down.

Graham: I wonder who’s given that idea such circulation. It seems to me that only the adversary would be pleased with that—that when we trust God we say, “I trust you, but I really don’t have any evidence for doing so.”

We say, “God, there’s so much evidence, I’m still studying it. The more I come to know you, the more I trust you.” One thing that has caused trouble is the use of these different words; trust is one thing, confidence is one thing, faith is another. They are all the same word in the Bible.

Lou: But still, some very sincere people have talked about faith as a leap in the dark. You go as far as you can on evidence, and then when you come to that cliff you just close your eyes and jump, and you hope that you land.

Graham: Well that’s the trouble. I think history is strewn with the wreckage of those who have been leaping in the dark. It’s a very dangerous thing to do. Now, it might be that God has asked me to do something like Abraham, which I momentarily cannot understand. But because of all the light, in full confidence in one I know very well, I move forward. I even know him well enough that he won’t be angry if I question him along the way. I hate to call that a leap in the dark. Many use this definition because they think they really are in the dark. I mean, some most distinguished theologians whose presentations are so admirable, nevertheless believe that God has never really revealed these matters to us. And we are in the dark. Now I admire them for

taking life so seriously in the dark. But I'm not going to say my faith in God is a leap in the dark. Christ came as the light—and I say to God, "I trust you, but I'm surely in the dark. Why do you leave us in the dark all the time?" So often it's people who don't know what to do with the Bible. They don't really believe in a personal God who really reveals himself. So in a way, it is this old-fashioned confidence in Scripture that leads us to reject that definition, I think.

Lou: A loss of that confidence in Scripture.

Graham: Yes, true. But because we have it, we would never say "we're in the dark." Look what he has paid to keep us in the light! So faith is the most enlightened, intelligent, rational decision we ever make, for which we have the most evidence. I mean, I would hesitate to say this, but I have more evidence for trusting God than even you, my friend. That's true, isn't it? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #4 with Lou Venden, "God's Way of Restoring Trust" recorded February, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/4MMCAG>

The gentleness of Jesus is what was disappointing so many of his followers. But then he demonstrated that he can resurrect the dead. And the theologians knew what this implied. And that's why it says, "From then on, they plotted to murder him." Because they realized that step by step he was demonstrating beyond question that he was the infinitely powerful but equally gracious one who fitted the Old Testament description.

More than that, he had the wisdom to wait until the fourth day and they must have realized it. And the wisdom with which he did things. He didn't display his erudition to be sure, but he knew that they had questioned his resurrection of Jairus' daughter before. And so this time he waited until the fourth day, because some of them believed that the spirit hovered nearby for three days in case of resuscitation. So he waited until the fourth day until the most skeptical person in his audience would admit that this time Lazarus was really dead. And then, when he said, "Roll away the stone," he wanted to hear them say, "Don't roll it away," an important key text, "he stinks." Because they would all admit that he really was dead. "Now," he said, "come forth."

They had no answer for that. And when you've run out of evidence, then you turn to violence. And they tried to kill him. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #7, "The Question of Authority" recorded February, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/7MMCAG>

But the great controversy is not over who has the power, is it? It's over who is telling the truth. God has been accused of the abuse of divine power, and I'm sure Satan accused him of abusing

his power in the time of the Flood – “See what he’ll do; obey him, or he’ll drown you!” The inhabitants of Babylon believed that: “Believe God, or he’ll drown you!” Well, they didn’t want to obey him, so they built the tall tower so they could escape the next flood when it came! {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Exodus*, recorded October, 1981, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1983:

<http://pkp.cc/3MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/4MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God’s original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found. {Ed 190.2}

The Bible contains a simple and complete system of theology and philosophy. {RH, June 11, 1908 par. 4}

Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do. The men in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men’s thought. . . . Instead of educated weaklings, institutions of learning may send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions. {Ed 17.2}

God permitted Satan to carry forward his work until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. . . All his [Satan’s] acts were so clothed with mystery that it was difficult to disclose to the angels the true nature of his work. . . . {PP 41.2}

It was his policy to perplex with subtle arguments concerning the purposes of God. Everything that was simple he shrouded in mystery, and by artful perversion cast doubt upon the plainest statements of Jehovah. {PP 41.3}

God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier, our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of Scriptures. {COL 60.1}

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. {PP 68.2}

From the beginning it has been Satan’s studied plan to cause men to forget God, that he might secure them to himself. Hence he has sought to misrepresent the character of God, to lead men to cherish a false conception of Him. The Creator has been presented to their minds as clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself,—as arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving,—that He might be feared, shunned, and even hated by men. Satan hoped to so confuse the minds of those whom he had deceived that they would put God out of their knowledge. {5T 738.1}

It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment. The religion of the Bible, full of love and goodness, and abounding in compassion, is darkened by superstition and clothed with terror. When we consider in what false colors Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes, millions, of skeptics and infidels. {GC88 536.2}

Satan has ascribed to God all the evils to which the flesh is heir. He has represented him as a God who delights in the sufferings of his creatures, who is revengeful and implacable. It was Satan who originated the doctrine of eternal torment as a punishment for sin, because in this way he could lead men into infidelity and rebellion, distract souls, and dethrone the human reason. {RH, November 17, 1891 par. 5}

Recommended Reading: *Patriarchs and Prophets* Chapter 4 – “The Plan of Redemption”

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