Matthew 18

Verses 1–4: Why do the disciples ask the question that they pose in verse 1? What does it suggest about their understanding of Jesus’s message? What do you make of the fact that they are arguing about who shall be first so shortly after Jesus has talked about his coming death (Matthew 17:22)?

In verse 3 the verb phrase “be converted” translates a Greek verb that means “turn.” To be converted, to repent, is to turn back, to return. In what sense is repentance a return? To what might it be a return?

Christ says that no one can even enter the kingdom (or reign) of heaven without becoming like a child. Then in verse 4 he says that if a person humbles himself and becomes as a child, then he or she is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. A logical conclusion from the two claims (though rhetoric may trump logic here) is that everyone who enters the kingdom of heaven is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. How do you make sense of that conclusion?

In Israel and Rome at this time, the child was not a legal person. Children were the property of their parents. Is that relevant to understanding what Jesus meant when he
said that we must become as children to take part in the reign of heaven? How is what Jesus says an answer to the disciples’ question?

**Verses 5–6:** Having answered the disciples’ question very briefly, Jesus moves to a discussion of offenses. Why? How are the two discussions connected?

Is Jesus speaking only of children here, or does the context suggest that he is speaking also of those who have become as little children? Does the use of the phrase “little ones who believe in me” in verse 6, rather than children, suggest that he has in mind a wider meaning? Many commentators believe that the first fourteen verses are about believers rather than children. They take the child to be an example of what the disciples are to become. What do you think of their interpretation?

The Greek word translated offend means “to cause to stumble.” What do you think that Jesus is speaking of?

**Verses 7–9:** What does it mean to say, “It must needs be that offences [stumblings] come”? Does it mean that stumbling/offending is unavoidable, or is Jesus speaking hyperbolically? What is the point of verses 8 and 9? Does the JST help us see that point more clearly?

In verses 6–7 Jesus speaks of one person who causes another to stumble. How is it significant that he now speaks of being caused to stumble by one’s own hand, foot, or eye? Does the JST answer that question?

Verse 9 refers to “hell fire” and may be a reference to Isaiah 66:24. Mark 9:47 gives it a name, Gehenna, the name of
the valley south of Jerusalem where trash was burned, the city dump. Isaiah seems to have that place in mind when he speaks of hell, into which Israel’s enemies would be cast. Does knowing these things add any meaning to these verses?

These verses seem to be addressed to those who are or will be leaders in the Church. How do they compare to the things he has said about the Pharisees and other leaders of the Jewish community at the time?

**Verses 10–14:** In verse 10 Jesus returns to the discussion of offending the little ones, though now he warns against despising them. The word translated *despise* could also be translated “not concerned for.” I prefer the second translation because it shows better the connection between verse 10 and verses 11–14. Why do you think Jesus returns to the earlier discussion of the little ones?

What does Jesus mean when he says “in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven”? Who are “their angels”? What does it mean always to behold the face of the Father?

The word translated *face* can also be translated *person*, and in Greek “those who see the face of a king” is used as a title for court officials.

How are verses 11–14 connected to verse 10? The first word of verse 11 is *for*, suggesting that there is a connection, that somehow verses 11–14 explain verse 10.

Sheep naturally stay together in a herd. How would one of the sheep have become lost? By stumbling? Does the
parable teach that the one lost sheep is more important than the ninety-nine? We often use this parable to teach the duties of a Church leader, but is this a parable about Church leaders or about Jesus?

**Verses 15–17:** How does Jesus’s advice here relate to the parable of the lost sheep? What does forgiving those who trespass have to do with lost sheep?

Explain verses 16–17. What does it mean to say that someone who will not deal with your complaint about his fault should, after all else, be dealt with as a Gentile unbeliever and a tax collector?

**Verse 18:** How does this verse fit with the theme we have seen so far in the chapter, that of offense and resolving offense? Is it an expansion of the last part of verse 17? If not, how is it related to what comes immediately before it?

**Verses 19–20:** Jesus seems to be speaking of shared prayer. What do these verses have to do with the theme of the previous verses?

**Verses 21–35:** The number seven was considered to be a perfect number, a number that showed completion. So when Peter asks Jesus whether he should forgive his brother seven times, he is implying that there is a limit to the number of times he must forgive: to the point at which the forgiveness is complete. Then if the offender continues to offend, forgiveness isn’t required. How should we understand Jesus’s response?

Notice that Jesus gives the explanation of the parable first and then the parable. Why do you think he does that?
The parable tells of a king who begins to check the account books of those in his court. In this case the word servant probably refers to a high official in the court. Otherwise he couldn’t have amassed such an incredible debt.

We can’t be sure of how to convert ancient money to contemporary values, but some have estimated that 10,000 talents would have been about 650,000 pounds of silver. (That’s about $1,750,000,000 in modern prices, but the value of silver has dramatically decreased over the last 600 years. In Jesus’s time it might have been worth as much as $3,250,000,000 in today’s dollars, perhaps more than all the wealth of the existing nations of the ancient world.) However accurate our estimates of the value of that much silver might be, the point is that the servant owed the king an enormous amount of money, and the implication is that he may have obtained it fraudulently. Standard practice was to sell into slavery a debtor who could not pay, and also his family, and to sell all of their possessions. That wouldn’t have paid the debt, but it would have punished the servant. How realistic was the servant’s promise to pay the debt?

What reason does Jesus give for the king forgiving the debt? The word translated “moved with compassion” means literally “inner organs were moved.” Jews and early Christians believed that the inner organs—in intestines, liver, stomach, heart, and so on—were where our deep emotions are felt. What does that tell us about the king’s response to his servant?
As the LDS footnotes point out, 100 pence was about three months’ wages for a laborer. What point is Jesus making by making the discrepancy in the debts so enormous? When the king learns of how the servant has treated his fellow servant, why does the king have the first servant tortured? Since the debt the servant owes cannot be repaid (in other words, it is too large, and as long as he is being tortured, he has no way to get the money for payment), how long will the torture last? Why does Jesus include the point about torture in the parable? Does God torture sinners?

What is the point of this parable as a whole? I have pointed out before that parables often answer a question that the disciple didn’t ask but that was a more important question. Does this parable do that? If so, what might that more important question be? Ask yourself that question and consider what your answer would be.

Luke 10

The assignment is only for verses 25–37, but the first part of the chapter is interesting enough to warrant our attention, though it doesn’t directly fit into the lesson’s theme “Who Is My Neighbor?”

Verse 1: Some interpreters see a connection between the seventy elders sent out to preach the gospel and the list of seventy nations in Genesis 10. Note that 70, like 7, is a number used to denote perfection or completion. “The seventy nations” in Genesis means “the whole world.” If there is a
connection between this seventy in Luke and the seventy in Genesis, what does it tell us about the seventy elders?

**Verses 2–16:** What is the point of verse 2? What are we admonished to pray for?

In verse 3 Jesus shifts the metaphor from laborers in the field to sheep among wolves. What is the point of that shift?

The word translated *scrip* in verse 4 means “a traveler’s bag.” What is the point of verse 4?

What does Jesus mean when he tells the Seventy not to greet people along the way? Does the reference in footnote 4b suggest an answer?

What does verse 6 mean by “the son of peace”? Most interpreters do not think that the phrase refers to the Lord. What else could it mean?

Verses 7–8 don’t stand out for us, but they probably did for these seventy elders, for “eat what they give you” contrasts sharply with the Pharisaic dietary laws. What might this commandment foreshadow?

What is Jesus commanding when he tells them to “go not from house to house”? Is he telling them not to go tracting?

Notice that in verse 9 Jesus commands them to do two things, to heal the sick and to preach that the kingdom of God “approaches” or “comes near.” Though the English verb phrase “is come nigh” has something of a static sense, the Greek verb that it translates (*engiken*, the third-person, singular, active, indicative of *engizō*) does not. “Is coming near” is a more literal translation. What does it
mean to say that the kingdom of God is near us or is coming near us?

Does the last part of verse 1 give one way to answer the question? Are there other ways? Is there a difference between preaching that the kingdom or reign is approaching and what the disciples are to teach after the resurrection?

Some have seen these commandments (take no money, salute no one, speak peace, eat what you are given, heal the sick) as an attack on Satan’s reign. Can you understand that interpretation? Can you explain it to someone else?

How have healing and preaching been related in Jesus’s mission? How are they related in the mission of the Seventy, in our own life in the gospel?

What point is Jesus making in verses 10–16? What is the symbolism of wiping the dust of the city from the feet?

**Verses 17–20:** When the Seventy return, what has most impressed them?

In verse 18, why does Jesus begin his response to them by saying, “I beheld Satan as lightning falling from heaven”? Is he saying something about the success of their mission?

In verse 19, why is the second thing he says to them “I have given unto you power (or authority)”? The verb that we translate “have given” could also be translated “have already given.” Is that significant? In what does Jesus say the Seventy should rejoice (verse 20)? Why?

**Verses 21–22:** For what is Jesus thankful? Explain.
Is Jesus’s use of the word *babes* related to the discussions of children in Matthew 18?

Some believe that the words of these verses were used in a hymn in the early Church. If they were, how do they apply to the early Saints? Is this a song that Latter-day Saints could sing?

**Verses 23–24:** Previous kings and prophets lived in hope, but the disciples see the fulfillment of their hopes. Why did Jesus tell the disciples this? Why does Luke tell us?

**Verses 25–37:** Is there a conceptual connection between the first part of this chapter and what follows? What might it be?

The parable of the Good Samaritan is perhaps the most famous of all Jesus’s parables. There are many interesting ways of reading it and more than enough questions to ask to fill several pages. But I will confine myself to a few notes and questions.

In verse 25 the word translated *lawyer* refers to Jewish leaders insofar as they were concerned with administering the law. They could be members of any of the contemporary parties—Sadducees, Pharisees, or scribes—but they were not lawyers in our sense of that word.

Luke says that a lawyer questioned Jesus, though he could have used one of the other, more specific terms to describe the one asking the questions. (Matthew describes him as a Pharisee, and Mark describes him as a scribe. Those terms overlapped.) Why does Luke use the word *lawyer*?

How is the lawyer’s question a test?
In verse 26 Jesus responds to his question with another question. Why? The lawyer’s answer (verse 27) combines Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18, and Jesus’s response (verse 28) echoes Leviticus 18:5. What does this teach us about the Old Testament and its relationship to Jesus’s teaching?

The word *neighbor* in verses 27 and 29 (as well as in the verses that follow) translates a Greek word that means “ones nearby,” as does the English word. However, the Hebrew equivalents in the Old Testament refer to someone who was a fellow member of the covenant. What is the lawyer asking in verse 29?

What does verse 29 mean when it says that the lawyer was “willing to justify himself”? The word translated *justify* could also be translated “make righteous.” Do we ever try to justify ourselves, make ourselves righteous? If so, how do we do it?

The Greek word translated *thieves* is the same word used to describe Barabbas (John 18:40) and the thieves crucified with Christ (Mark 15:27). Is that significant to our interpretation of the story?

A priest would be one of the religious leaders; a Levite was one who assisted in the temple. Why might they have seen the wounded man and passed by? Who would be comparable in our own culture? Is it likely that those who passed by were just insensitive to his problem?

The contrast between those who held important positions in Israel and the outcast and hated Samaritan is something no one who heard the parable could have missed.
Why do you think Jesus told a story that so explicitly condemned Jewish leaders?

The word translated *compassion* in verse 33 is the same word used in Matthew 18:27. So what?

What kind of assistance does the Samaritan offer in verses 34–35?

In verse 37 the lawyer seems to be unable to simply say “the Samaritan.” I imagine the name sticking in his throat, so he used the description to avoid having to say the name. But the result is that he says something more significant. How is what the lawyer said significant?

In the Old Testament, the word *mercy*, as it is used here, means the attitude that God requires that each human being show to other humans. What does the lawyer’s response teach us about the Samaritan? How does this prefigure the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles?

How does Jesus’s answer in verse 37 differ from his answer in verse 29, or does it?

**Verses 38–42:** Why does this story follow so closely on the heels of the parable of the Good Samaritan? What contrasts are we supposed to see? How are both Mary and Martha different from the lawyer?

In the parable that Jesus has just told, the focus is at least partly on the practical response of the Samaritan to the wounded man. How is practical service dealt with in this story? What does the juxtaposition of these two stories teach us? How does this story fit into the theme of the chapter?
Why would Martha have been engaged in “much serving”? Would Martha have understood Jesus’s comment to be a remark about the meal she was preparing? How else might she have understood it? We often read this short story as Jesus rebuking Martha, but is he? How might he be coming to Martha’s defense as well as Mary’s?

What kinds of things worry us, keeping us from sitting at Jesus’s feet?