

## ***Bible reading and questions week 1 Matthew 1- 4 Psalm 1***

**Matthew**— The purpose of this book is to prove that Jesus is the King and long promised Messiah of Israel. Matthew quotes more than sixty Old Testament prophecies showing that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of David. Since Matthew (also called Levi) was a hated tax collector before following Christ, he shows that the Lord extends grace and mercy to any who repent of their sin, trusts Christ, and turn their lives over to Him.

**Matthew 1**— In today's society, a list of one's ancestors is both irrelevant and boring. To the Jewish audience it was absolutely necessary to prove the right of Jesus to the throne of David. Starting with verse 18, Matthew wastes no time in explaining the birth of Christ and the strategic choosing of Mary and Joseph to bring this about. ***How does Joseph's actions and reactions exemplify a godly character?***

**Matthew 2**— Wise men from the east came to Bethlehem to worship and present gifts to the newborn "King of the Jews." Because of King Herod's jealous rage, God warns both the wise men and Joseph through dreams to flee from Herod. After Herod's death, Jesus and his family returned from Egypt to Israel and settled in Nazareth, the home of Joseph and Mary. Four times in these two chapters the angel of the Lord gave instructions to Joseph through dreams. ***What are different ways that God guides and instructs us today?***

**Matthew 3**— John the Baptist was a forerunner of Jesus who was called to prepare the hearts of the people so that they would listen and obey Christ. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River in order to "fulfill all righteousness." ***1. As you read this chapter, what stands out in your mind about the ministry and person of John the Baptist? 2. Explain how the teaching of the Trinity is clearly seen in this chapter?***

**Matthew 4**— Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the Devil (v. 1-11). Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee preaching repentance and the gospel of the kingdom (v. 12-24). ***In each of the three temptations, what was the means Jesus used to defeat Satan? How is this an example to us?***

### ***Psalm 1***

**Psalm**— The book of Psalms (150) is divided into five sections (books) with each ending in a doxology. The first section goes from Psalm 1:1 to 41:13. The book of Psalms gives the full expression of our praise, worship, joy, sadness, and trust. Psalms has been the hymnbook of Israel and then the Church for the last 3000 years.

**Psalm 1**— This Psalm sets the course for the lives of all people of all time. Either we choose lives that honor God and are saturated by His Word, thus leading to life and blessedness, or we choose lives of self-will and rebellion which ultimately leads to eternal destruction. ***As you begin this year in Next Level, which do you choose? What are the "blessed" (happy) people like and not like, and what are the promises God gives to them?***

## **Week 2; Psalm 2, Matthew 5-9, Psalm 3**

**Psalm 2**— This Psalm speaks of the sovereignty of God and His Christ over all people and all creation for all time. It is eternal suicide to reject the Lord as the King of our lives. ***What are the various reactions you see in the world today to the Lordship of Jesus Christ?***

**Matthew 5**— Chapters 5 to 7 is called the “Sermon on the Mount” because Jesus gave it on the side of a mountain (or hillside) near Capernaum. These chapters give the teaching of Jesus on the law and how it relates to real inner transformation of the heart rather than just outward conformity to the rules and regulations that the Pharisees taught. ***1. Explain in a few words the meaning of the eight qualities (Beatitudes) of the blessed (v. 3-10). 2. How does Jesus take the teaching of the law about anger, lust, divorce, revenge, and love to a higher standard?***

**Matthew 6**— In this chapter Jesus shows the Pharisee’s self-righteousness in giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting. He teaches us a pattern for our prayers (The Lord’s Prayer) and includes powerful lessons on money and worry. ***1. As you read Verses 25 to 34, give the reasons why we are not to worry. 2. What is the promise God gives us if we seek first His kingdom and righteousness in our lives?***

**Matthew 7**— In this final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks about judging others (v 1-6), a persevering prayer life (v. 7-11), and finishes His teaching with vital comparisons between the narrow gate and the broad gate, good trees and bad trees, and obedience and disobedience to His teaching (v.12-29). ***1. Why do you think Jesus invites us to ask for things from our Heavenly Father? 2. In verses 21 to 27, what is the difference between those who profess they belong to Christ and those who really belong to Christ?***

**Matthew 8**— Jesus shows His power and compassion through physical healing, casting out demons, and calming the storm. The faith of the Centurion (v. 5-13) is contrasted with the faith of the disciples (v. 23-27). ***1. As you read the passage about the Roman Centurion, explain why Jesus was amazed at his faith including his understanding who Jesus was. 2. Why did Jesus seem to make discipleship so hard (v. 18-22)***

**Matthew 9**— The authority, power, and compassion of Jesus are seen in the healing of the paralyzed man (v. 1-7), the bleeding woman (v. 18-22), the raising of the girl to life (v. 23-26), and the healing of the blind and mute (v. 27-34). The scribes and the Pharisees attack Jesus because He says He forgives sins, associates with tax collectors and sinners like Matthew (v. 9-12), and His disciples do not fast like them. ***1. After calling Matthew to be His disciple, Jesus went to his house to eat with the hated “tax collectors and sinners.” In what way can we follow Christ’s example where we live? 2. What prayer did Christ command us to pray? Why? See verses 35-38.***

**Psalm 3**— As David was surrounded by Absalom’s army, his trust and hope was in the Lord whose very presence was a shield around him. This psalm of lament and confidence “becomes a pattern for praise, peace, and prayer amidst pressure.” (MacArthur) *Share a time you felt betrayed and abandoned by someone. What brought you through?*

## **Week 3 Psalm 4 Matthew 10-14, Psalm 5**

**Psalm 4**— In the dark experiences of life, we cry out to God and know He hears us when we call. Under dire pressure, David vacillates between feelings of terror and trust. Confidence in the Lord finally wins the day. After crying out to God in his distress (v. 1-2), ***what reasons does David give why he has become joyful, peaceful, and secure?***

**Matthew 10**— Jesus sends out His twelve disciples with authority to cast out evil spirits and heal diseases, giving them detailed instructions for their ministry. He warns His followers of great persecution in their service for Him but encourages them with the promise of care, protection, and guidance. He clearly delineates the cost as well as the rewards of discipleship. ***What kind of commitment does Jesus call for in verses 37 to 39?***

**Matthew 11**— Jesus eases John the Baptist's doubts about His being the Messiah and commends John for his faithfulness in fulfilling his calling and ministry (v. 1-19). Our Lord condemns the cities of Galilee for their indifference and lack of faith in Him and His teaching, but commends the common people who gladly heard Him. Jesus promises rest to all who are burdened down with the cares of life and with legalistic rule-keeping religion if they come to Him and take up His yoke. ***1. Jesus said, "But wisdom is justified (vindicated/proved right) by her actions (v. 16-19)." Explain what He meant. 2. What advantages do we have by taking the yoke of Christ? See verses 28-30.***

**Matthew 12**— Jesus has run-ins with the Pharisees when He was eating and healing on the Sabbath (v. 1-14). As He heals all the sick, Jesus rebuts the accusation by the Pharisees that His power comes from Satan and then warns them against the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and careless words (v. 15-37). Asking Him to show them a sign, our Lord declares to the Pharisees that the only sign He will give them is that of Jonah. Jesus illustrates to them that their teaching of self-reformation will only result in Satan's control over their lives (v. 38-45). Finally, Jesus declares that His real family members are those who do the will of His Father in heaven (v. 46-50). ***What is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Who can commit the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?***

**Matthew 13**— Jesus delivers the parable of the sower by the Sea of Galilee, explaining the purpose for parables and then privately interpreting them to his disciples (v. 1-23). Jesus proceeds to give many parables to his disciples including: (1) parable of weeds (v. 24-30, 36-43), (2) the mustard seed and the leaven (v. 31-33), (3) the hidden treasure (v.44), the pearl of great value (v.45-46), fishing net (v. 47-50), and new and old treasures (v. 51-52). Returning to His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus is rejected by them (v. 53-58). ***1. What are the four different types of soil that Jesus gives in the Parable of the Sower? What are the reasons why the first three types of soil did not take root or was unfruitful (v. 18-23)? 2. Verse 58 says, "and He did***

***not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.” Does your lack of faith in Christ limit His work in your life? If so, what do you need to do to change this?***

**Matthew 14**— John the Baptist is imprisoned and then executed by Herod, and Jesus tries to withdraw to be alone (v. 1-13). Jesus feeds the five thousand (v. 13-21) and heals the sick at Gennesaret (v. 34-36). After sending the disciples across the Sea of Galilee and going up on the mountain to pray, Jesus walks on the water toward his disciples who are gripped with fear thinking He is a ghost. At the summons of Jesus, Peter steps out of the boat and walks on water but because of lack of faith must be saved by Jesus (v. 22-33). Jesus invited Peter to step out of the boat and to walk on water. ***Is there some area in your life He is asking you to get out of the boat and trust Him? If so, what is keeping you from getting out of the boat?***

**Psalms 5**— "Give ear... O Lord." David asks God to hear his prayer. But he does much more than that. David eagerly expects an answer. ***What gives David the assurance that he will be heard when he prays?***

## Week 4 Psalm 6, Matthew 15-19, Psalm 7

**Psalm 6**— David shows us an instance where he had undergone the Lord's discipline. Indeed, all who are godly will endure His loving discipline from time to time. David cries out for God's mercy. In Jesus we see the extent to which God will go to offer us mercy that we don't deserve. ***How does David's response to God's discipline exemplify godly sorrow?***

**Matthew 15**— Christ rebukes the Pharisees after their question about ritual washing of hands because they followed traditions that are contrary to the teaching of God's Word. Jesus placed the real importance on the condition of the heart and the moral defilement it produces in our lives, words, and actions (v. 1-20). Withdrawing to Tyre and Sidon, Jesus heals the demon possessed girl and is amazed at the faith of her Canaanite mother (v. 21-28). Jesus feeds the four thousand (v.32-39). The Pharisees were condemned for their hypocrisy by Christ in this chapter for two reasons: ***(1) much of their teachings were of human origin and not from God, and (2) they put importance on externals but overlooked the real moral defilement in their hearts. When do traditions that churches have become wrong***

**Matthew 16**— After the Pharisees test Jesus by asking for a sign, He warns the disciples of the "leaven" or teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (v. 1-12). After Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Jesus then reveals to them His suffering, death, and resurrection (v. 13-23). Christ challenges His disciples to deny themselves and take up His cross and follow Him, thus resulting in eternal dividends (v. 24-28). ***1. Jesus said, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (v.18). How do you understand this verse in relation to those who say it proves that Peter was the first Pope? 2. In verses 24 to 27 Jesus makes the call for real discipleship. What did he mean by the words "Take up his cross and follow me?"***

**Matthew 17**— Jesus shows forth His future glory as He is transformed (transfigured) before Peter, James, and John on the mountain while the Father speaks from a cloud (v. 1-13). Jesus casts the demon out of the boy contrasting His effective faith with the defective faith of His disciples (v.14-21). Jesus sends Peter fishing in order for him to find money in the mouth of the fish so he can pay their temple tax (v. 24-27). ***Share the details of the story of Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. Why is this incident significant in the life of Jesus (see Revelation 1:12-18)?***

**Matthew 18**— Jesus teaches us about our relationships in the church and how we are to behave in community with one another. He instructs about the characteristics and importance of children (v. 1-14). Jesus gives us the pattern of conflict resolution and discipline in the church as well as highlighting the power of united prayer (v. 20). He gives us the parable of the unforgiving servant and the necessity of extending forgiveness to others no matter what the

situation. 1. ***What are the steps we should take in the process of reconciliation (v. 15-17).*** 2. ***How is having an unforgiving spirit incongruent to the life of a Christian?***

**Matthew 19**— Answering the question of the Pharisees, Jesus speaks on the subject of marriage, divorce, and being single for God’s kingdom (v. 1-12). After blessing the children, Jesus encounters the rich young man who appears to be righteous but loves his riches more than God (v. 13-26). Finally, Christ promises temporal and eternal rewards for those who leave everything to follow Him (v. 27-30). 1. In reading the story of the rich young man (v. 16-26), which of the Ten Commandments did Jesus leave out? ***Why is the omission of this commandment relevant to what the young man was lacking (Exodus 20:3-17)?*** 2. ***Astonished at the difficulty of a rich person being saved, Peter asked, “Who then can be saved?” How would you answer Peter’s question?***

**Psalms 7**— David is a colorful writer, using graphic language to depict his request to God. His enemy will “tear like a lion, rip to pieces, and trample to the ground.” He uses even greater attributes for God. God is his refuge, judge, the Most High, his shield, and warrior. A lion cannot scale a fortress or overcome an armed soldier. David understood that God protects his own. ***On what basis does David request God’s assistance? Do we have that same right?***