

“Live Well by Loving the Least”
Matthew 25:31-46

The Point: In light of the coming judgment of the King, live well by loving the least of these.

I. The King Will Return in Glory to Judge the Nations (25:31-33).

- The Son of Man = one of Jesus’ favorite titles for himself. Why? On the one hand, it highlights his humanity. In Jesus Christ, God became man. On the other hand, it was a title loaded with messianic implications. **Daniel 7:13-14 says, “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”**
 - a. The King *will come* again (31).
 - For believers, nothing could be better than the return of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God. Paul says that when Christ returns he will be “marveled at among all who have believed.” (2 Thess 1:10)
 - We must be ready for the return of Christ.
 - b. The King will come in glory (31).
 - The first time he came his glory was concealed. This time his glory will be revealed. Jesus Christ is completely glorious. He shares all the manifold perfections of God.
 - c. The Son of Man will Judge everyone (32).
 - There will be a clear separation. Jesus clearly undercuts the notion so popular in our culture, that all roads are leading to the same place. Jesus is not a pluralist.
 - The Coming Judgment should serve as an impetus to share the gospel.

II. We Must Live Well Until He Returns (25:34-46).

a. Live well because the judgment of Christ will be based on our deeds.

- The pattern of Scripture is that salvation is by grace but the judgment is based on our deeds.
 - **“For you will render to a man according to his work.” (Psalm 62:12)**
 - **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that we may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, both whether or evil.” (2 Cor. 5:10)**
- How is this teaching not salvation by works?
 1. When interpreting Scripture, context is king. It’s not as if Matthew didn’t start his gospel in Matthew 1:21 by saying that Jesus received his name “because he save people from their sins.”
 2. Verse 34 is the key verse in this passage: “Inherit the kingdom.” We only inherit that which is a gift. And added to that, Jesus says that this kingdom was “prepared for you before the foundation of the world,” another indicator of grace.
- **Salvation is by grace through faith, but our works validate our faith**
 - Ephesians 2:8-10 says this best. “For by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast. *For* we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for *good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
 - In other words, we engage in good works because we have experienced grace, not to earn God’s saving grace.
 - God saves and sanctifies his people for service. This passage reinforces the truth that our lives *must* back up our profession.

- The way of Jesus is to wed our head (our knowledge of God), with our hearts (our love and worship and devotion to God), with our hands (to get out and demonstrate our love in practical deeds of service to those in need).
- In this moment of judgment the greater stress is laid on what happens out there, beyond the walls of Sunday morning worship. Worship on Sundays should fuel mission through the week.
- Brennan Manning has a great quote about the need for us to live out our faith in tangible ways. He said, **“The single greatest cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, then walk out the door, and deny him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.”**

b. Live well by loving the least of these.

- Jesus zeroes in on how we extend mercy to those in need. It is not insignificant that we have this list of needy people *four* different times. “I was hungry. I was thirsty. I was a stranger. I was naked. I was sick. I was in prison.”
- Let’s establish who “the least of these my brothers” are. Most scholars believe that Jesus is referring to his disciples. That understanding accords well with the unique union between Jesus and his people.
- Conceding that, I believe the implications of these words extend well beyond followers of Christ.
 - **“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10)**
 - **“and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all” (2 Thess. 3:12)**
 - **“See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.” (1 Thess. 5:15)**
- Who do you associate with? Who are you willing to serve? Are you willing to serve the insignificant, those not esteemed in the sight of others? Are you willing to serve the hungry and the homeless? Are you willing to serve foreigners and immigrants who don’t look like you, talk like you, or smell like you. Are you willing to care for the orphan and the widowed?
- Question: How are you supposed to even begin to fulfill this command to love the least of these? Start with the one in front of you.
- Simply put, God calls us to be faithful with the opportunities, gifts, and resources that he entrusts to us. We must give of ourselves. We must take up our towels and meet the needs around in the strength God supplies.

What happens when we serve?

1. People receive a taste of the coming kingdom of God. All of our deeds of mercy point forward to the coming kingdom of God.
2. People receive a picture of the gospel. Why is it so important to serve the lowest? Because that’s exactly what Jesus did.