When You Serve the Least, You Serve the King Q&A Guide

Nov 24, 2026

About this guide: anyone is welcome to use this guide, including members of the Intercessor Church Community Groups. Read it before class or on your own so you come prepared and well versed in the passage. It follows the Discover section of the group outline, section by section. For each question it gathers what trusted commentaries and the ICCEC Catechism say, then adds a Summary that pulls it together and a Deep Dive with background and passages to read ahead of time.

How to read this guide: each question is labeled by section and number, so A1 is the first question in section A, A2 is the second, and so on. The questions are written for this guide. Each one covers the ground of the outline question and takes it a step further. The linked passage after each question is the one the outline points to, or a verse inside that section's reading, so you can click it and read it in class. Anything after the word "also" is a wider range or an extra passage this guide adds. Every line under Commentary and ICCEC Catechism is quoted word for word from the source named in parentheses after it. The **Summary** and **Deep Dive** under each question are written for this guide, drawing on those quotes and the other sources listed at the end. Scripture quoted in the summaries and deep dives is from the New King James Version, and Q-numbers are question numbers in the ICCEC Catechism.

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This guide follows the Intercessor Church Community Group outline "Ready for the King, Week 4: Feast of Christ the King, When You Serve the Least, You Serve the King."

A. Christ Is the King Who Deserves Our Allegiance

A1. Within three days Jesus would hang on a cross, yet He speaks of coming "in His glory" with "all the holy angels," sitting on "the throne of His glory," and gathering "All the nations" before Him. What do these opening verses claim about who Jesus is, and why does it matter that He says this on the eve of His suffering? (Matthew 25:31-33; also Daniel 7:13-14)

Commentary

- "Jesus here was either guilty of megalomania (delusion about one's own power or importance) or He is indeed the Lord of glory, who will judge the nations from His throne." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 25)
- "His first coming was under a dark cloud of obscurity; but his second will be in a bright cloud of glory." (Benson Commentary on Matthew 25:31)
- "But no one that reads this can reasonably suppose that he who speaks thus is a mere man." (Benson Commentary on Matthew 25:31)
- "For now is He come in dishonor, now in affronts and reproaches; but then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory." (John Chrysostom, Homily 79 on Matthew)
- "It expresses the idea that he will come 'as a king and judge' to assemble his subjects before him, and to appoint them their rewards." (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 25:31)
- "The image of the Son of Man coming in glory reflects imagery from Daniel 7:13-14 and recalls other places in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus foretells the coming judgment" (Carla Works, Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46)

ICCEC Catechism

- "Because Jesus obediently fulfilled and completed the work of the Father on earth, He has now been given all authority both on earth and in heaven." (Q-124)
- "Because all authority for judgment has been given to Christ by the Father, we all will stand before Christ and be judged for our thoughts and actions towards God and our neighbor." (Q-127)

Summary

These verses claim that Jesus is the King and Judge of every person who has ever lived. Either He was deluded about His own importance or He truly is the Lord of glory who will judge the nations from His throne (Guzik). No one reading this can reasonably think the speaker is a mere man (Benson). His first coming was under a cloud of obscurity, but His second will be in a bright cloud of glory (Benson). He came the first time in dishonor and

reproach, but then He will sit on the throne of His glory (Chrysostom). The throne language means He will come as a king and judge to gather His subjects before Him (Barnes). The picture of the Son of Man coming in glory draws on Daniel 7:13-14 (Works). Saying this just before the cross shows the disciples who it really is that is about to suffer, and it steadies them for what is coming. Because He finished the Father's work, He has been given all authority on earth and in heaven (Q-124), and we will all stand before Him and answer for our thoughts and actions toward God and our neighbor (Q-127).

Deep Dive

Daniel saw "One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven," to whom "was given dominion and glory and a kingdom" (Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus takes that title for Himself: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Matthew 25:31). After the resurrection He says, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). Paul, in one of the outline's readings, writes, "For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25). Psalm 95, also one of the outline's readings, calls the Lord "the great King above all gods" (Psalm 95:3). This passage closes Jesus' long teaching on the end of the age in Matthew 24 and 25, and the outline reads it for the Feast of Christ the King.

Read before class: Matthew 25:31-33; Daniel 7:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:21-28

A2. A Savior rescues us; a King rules us. What would it look like for Jesus to be King over your schedule, your money, your words, and your relationships, and why is it possible to welcome Him as Savior while quietly keeping parts of life back from His rule? (Matthew 25:31; also Luke 6:46; Philippians 2:9-11)

Commentary

- "In saying, 'Jesus is Lord,' we commit ourselves to obey Him." (GotQuestions.org, What does it mean that Jesus is Lord?)
- "An acknowledgement of Jesus' lordship is logically accompanied by a submission to Jesus' authority. If Jesus is Lord, then He owns us; He has the right to tell us what to do." (GotQuestions.org, What does it mean that Jesus is Lord?)
- "He is more than the Messiah, more than the Savior; He is the Lord of all." (GotQuestions.org, What does it mean that Jesus is Lord?)
- "taking the title of king with great propriety, when he is speaking of himself as exercising the highest act of kingly power" (Benson Commentary on Matthew 25:34)

- "That is, the Lord Jesus, the King of Zion and of the universe, now acting as Judge" (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 25:34)
- "Jesus Christ is the great Shepherd; he will shortly distinguish between those that are his, and those that are not." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on Matthew 25:31-46)

ICCEC Catechism

- "He possesses in the highest degree the knowledge of a prophet, the holiness of a high priest, and power of a king." (Q-83)
- "We must love Christ more than ourselves and all others." (Q-323)

Summary

This is an application question. Common answers: letting Him set our priorities before the week fills up, giving and spending as people who answer to Him, speaking to others the way He would, forgiving when He says to forgive, and obeying when it costs something. To say "Jesus is Lord" is to commit ourselves to obey Him (GotQuestions). Acknowledging His lordship goes hand in hand with submitting to His authority; if He is Lord, He owns us and has the right to tell us what to do (GotQuestions). He is more than the Messiah and more than the Savior; He is the Lord of all (GotQuestions). In this passage He takes the title of King because He is carrying out the highest act of kingly power (Benson). He is the King of Zion and of the universe, now acting as Judge (Barnes). He is also the great Shepherd, who will soon distinguish those who are His from those who are not (Matthew Henry). He holds in the highest degree the power of a king (Q-83), and a disciple must love Christ more than self and all others (Q-323). We hold parts of life back because being rescued costs us nothing, while being ruled touches everything.

Deep Dive

Jesus asks, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). He warns, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). God has given Him "the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" and "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:9-11). Psalm 95 joins worship and obedience: "Oh come, let us worship and bow down," and then, "Today, if you will hear His voice: 'Do not harden your hearts'" (Psalm 95:6-8). The outline's key insight for this section is that Jesus must be Lord over every part of our lives.

Read before class: Matthew 25:31-33; Luke 6:46-49; Philippians 2:5-11; Psalm 95:1-11

A3. The Shepherd-King "will separate them one from another," and in the end there are only two sides. What rivals compete with Jesus for first place in our hearts today, such as comfort, money, approval, politics, or a full calendar, and what are the warning signs that one of them has started making our decisions? (Matthew 25:32-33; also Matthew 6:24)

Commentary

- "The supreme affections can be fixed on only one object." (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 6:24)
- "His affections and obedience would be divided, and he would fail altogether in his duty to one or the other." (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 6:24)
- "The man who loves the world will, even in the midst of lip-homage, hate the service of God in his inmost heart." (Ellicott's Commentary on Matthew 6:24)
- "There are not three categories, but only two: sheep and goats, right and left." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 25)
- "All other distinctions will be done away; but the great one between saints and sinners, holy and unholy, will remain for ever." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on Matthew 25:31-46)
- "For now they are not separated, but all mingled together, but the division then shall be made with all exactness." (John Chrysostom, Homily 79 on Matthew)

ICCEC Catechism

- "We disobey the first commandment by the idolatry of putting any person, place, or thing before God." (Q-289)
- "God requires us to honor, obey, and worship God and Him alone, as Creator of heaven and earth." (Q-288)

Summary

This is an application question. Common rivals: money and security, comfort, the approval of others, career, family put ahead of God, politics, entertainment, and a calendar too full to notice anyone. Warning signs include what we think about most, what we will not give up, what makes us anxious or angry when it is threatened, and what regularly wins when it conflicts with obeying Jesus. Our deepest affections can be fixed on only one object (Barnes); a servant with two masters ends up divided and fails one of them (Barnes). A person who loves the world may still pay God lip service while resisting His service in the heart (Ellicott). In the end there are not three groups but two, sheep and goats, right and left (Guzik). Every other distinction will pass away, and only the one between the holy and

the unholy will remain (Matthew Henry). For now the two are mingled together, but then the division will be exact (Chrysostom). Putting any person, place, or thing before God is idolatry (Q-289); the first commandment calls us to honor, obey, and worship Him alone (Q-288).

Deep Dive

Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters," and "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Mammon is an old word for wealth. He gives the remedy in the same chapter: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). In the passage the King separates people "as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32). In the countryside sheep and goats grazed together by day and were often separated at night (D. A. Carson, quoted by Guzik). In Ezekiel, one of the outline's readings, God says, "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out" (Ezekiel 34:11), and He promises to judge between one sheep and another. The outline's reflection asks whether Jesus is truly reigning over the heart or other priorities have taken His place.

Read before class: Matthew 25:31-33; Matthew 6:19-24; Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

B. Christ Is the King Who Identifies with the Least

B1. The King names six needs: hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison. Which of the six stirs you most, and which do you find easiest to overlook? What might your answers show about where God is inviting you to grow? (Matthew 25:35-36; also Isaiah 58:6-7)

Commentary

- "The first three are recognised duties, the last three are voluntary acts of self-forgetting love." (Cambridge Bible on Matthew 25:35-36)
- "The passage furnishes six out of the list of the seven corporal works of mercy in Christian ethics" (Ellicott's Commentary on Matthew 25:35)
- "By showing kindness to the poor, the needy, and the sick, they show that they possess his spirit, for he did it when on earth" (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 25:35)
- "And mark how easy are His injunctions. He said not, I was in prison, and you set me free; I was sick, and you raised me up again; but, you visited me, and, you came to me." (John Chrysostom, Homily 79 on Matthew)

- "It was often the responsibility of loved ones to provide some basic necessities while the person was in jail." (Carla Works, Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46)
- "All the works of outward mercy here mentioned suppose faith and love" (Benson Commentary on Matthew 25:35-36)

ICCEC Catechism

- "We are called to pick up our cross and deny ourselves daily by living a sacrificial life through the physical and spiritual works of mercy and grace toward others." (Q-270)
- "Visiting the sick, ministering to them, and if necessary aiding them in Christian preparation for death." (Q-271)

Summary

This is an application question. Common answers: many are moved by hunger or sickness because they have lived it or seen it up close, while prisoners and strangers are the easiest to overlook because they are out of sight or outside our circle. The needs we avoid often show where fear, inconvenience, or prejudice still has a hold on us. The first three acts were recognized duties, and the last three are freely chosen acts of self-forgetting love (Cambridge Bible). These six are part of the traditional list of seven corporal works of mercy (Ellicott). Kindness to the poor, the needy, and the sick shows that a person has Christ's spirit, because this is what He did on earth (Barnes). The requests are easy: not to free the prisoner or heal the sick, only to visit and to come (Chrysostom). In that day a prisoner often depended on loved ones for basic necessities (Works). These outward works of mercy assume faith and love behind them (Benson). We are called to a sacrificial life of physical and spiritual works of mercy (Q-270), which include visiting and ministering to the sick (Q-271).

Deep Dive

The King says, "I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" (Matthew 25:35-36). Isaiah describes the fast God chooses: "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him" (Isaiah 58:7). In Ezekiel God Himself does this work: "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick" (Ezekiel 34:16). A seventh physical work of mercy is traditionally added to these six: burying those who have died in poverty (Q-271). James writes that pure religion is "to visit orphans and widows in their trouble" (James 1:27).

Read before class: Matthew 25:34-40; Isaiah 58:6-10; James 1:27

B2. The righteous are surprised: "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You?" Why does Jesus count what is done for "one of the least of these My brethren" as done to Himself, and what does their surprise tell us about the kind of love He is looking for? (Matthew 25:37-40; also Acts 9:4-5; Matthew 10:40-42)

Commentary

- "How great is the condescension and kindness of the Judge of the world, thus to reward our actions, and to consider what we have done to the poor as done to him!" (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 25:40)
- "From this identification it follows that he regards that which is done to others as done to himself." (Pulpit Commentary on Matthew 25:40)
- "Of all it is true that He, the Lord, who took their flesh and blood, 'is not ashamed to call them brethren'" (Ellicott's Commentary on Matthew 25:40)
- "The righteous ones performed these deeds with no idea that they were ministering to Christ." (Carla Works, Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46)
- "Jesus can identify with the least of these because he has walked in their shoes" (Carla Works, Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46)
- "Judgment simply brings out a reality that has been present all along." (Greg Carey, Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46)
- "The good works mentioned in the parable are not the cause of salvation but the effect of salvation." (GotQuestions.org, What is the meaning of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats?)

ICCEC Catechism

- "We experience this in the sacraments, in our love for each other and in our finding Christ in the poor." (Q-217)
- "in each other, in the face of the poor and in the sacraments, particularly in the Eucharist." (Q-274)

Summary

Jesus has so joined Himself to people in need that He takes what is done to them as done to Him. He so fully identifies with the human family whose nature He took that He counts what is done to others as done to Himself (Pulpit Commentary). The Lord who took our flesh and blood is not ashamed to call the least His brethren (Ellicott). It is great kindness in the Judge of the world to treat what we do for the poor as done for Him (Barnes). He

can identify with the least because He has walked in their shoes (Works). The righteous served without any idea that they were serving Christ (Works), and their surprise shows that their love was not a performance for a reward. Judgment simply brings to light what has been true of a person all along (Carey). The good works in this passage are not the cause of salvation but its effect (GotQuestions). We experience the life of the world to come in finding Christ in the poor (Q-217), and by faith we see God in each other and in the face of the poor (Q-274).

Deep Dive

The King answers, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40). The risen Jesus spoke the same way to Saul, who was attacking Christians: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). He told the Twelve, "He who receives you receives Me" (Matthew 10:40), and promised that even "a cup of cold water" given to "one of these little ones" would not lose its reward (Matthew 10:42). Proverbs says, "He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given" (Proverbs 19:17). The kingdom is something the righteous "inherit," and it was "prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). An inheritance is received, not earned (Matthew Henry). Paul says we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10).

Read before class: Matthew 25:34-40; Acts 9:1-5; Matthew 10:40-42; Ephesians 2:8-10

B3. Jesus describes ordinary acts: food, a drink, a welcome, clothing, a visit. Thinking of your neighborhood, workplace, family, and church, who may be feeling overlooked, lonely, unwelcome, or forgotten, and what is one small, concrete thing you could do for that person this week? (Matthew 25:34-36; also Hebrews 13:1-3)

Commentary

- "Followers of Christ will treat others with kindness, serving them as if they were serving Christ Himself." (GotQuestions.org, What is the meaning of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats?)
- "The 'least of these' are easily overlooked and ignored." (GotQuestions.org, Who are the "least of these" in the Bible?)
- "Not only are believers to provide this service for one another, but they are to demonstrate Christ's love by ministering to others who may have no one to care for them." (Carla Works, Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46)

- "To receive such to the rites of hospitality was, in Eastern countries, where there were few or no public houses, a great virtue." (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 25:35)
- "by entertaining the stranger we may perhaps be honored with the presence of those whose society will be to us an honor and a blessing." (Barnes' Notes on Hebrews 13:2)
- "The brethren are the Christian poor and needy and suffering, in the first place, but ultimately and inferentially any suffering people anywhere." (Expositor's Greek Testament on Matthew 25:40)

ICCEC Catechism

- "It is made visible in the Eucharist, in the Church's life of service to the poor, and in his healing and transforming work in the lives of people." (Q-231)
- "It is to see others no longer from a human point of view, but rather to see them as those created in his image." (Q-270)

Summary

This is an application question. Common answers: a widow or widower eating alone, a new family at church, a coworker going through a divorce, a neighbor who is homebound, a teenager on the edge of the group, a relative no one calls, or someone in a hospital, nursing home, or jail. Small steps include a phone call, a meal, a ride, an invitation to sit together, a handwritten note, or a visit. Followers of Christ serve others as if they were serving Christ Himself (GotQuestions). The least of these are easily overlooked and ignored (GotQuestions). Believers are to care for one another and also for people who have no one else to care for them (Works). Receiving a stranger was a great virtue where there were few public lodgings (Barnes), and the one who welcomes a stranger may be honored by a guest who turns out to be a blessing (Barnes). The Lord's brethren are first the Christian poor and suffering, and in the end any suffering person anywhere (Expositor's Greek Testament). The kingdom is made visible in the Church's service to the poor (Q-231), and mercy sees others as people made in God's image (Q-270).

Deep Dive

Hebrews says, "Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels" (Hebrews 13:1-2). Paul urges believers to be "distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality" (Romans 12:13). When Jesus saw the crowds, "He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Paul sets the order of care: "let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). The outline's three practices for the week are to see someone, to serve

someone, and to seek Christ daily. Its closing thought adds that Jesus does not ask us to meet every need in the world, only to be faithful with the opportunities He places in front of us.

Read before class: Matthew 25:34-40; Hebrews 13:1-3; Romans 12:9-13

C. Christ Is the King Who Calls Us to Account

C1. Those on the left are not charged with theft, violence, or cruelty. Every charge is something they did not do: "you gave Me no food." Why does Jesus treat doing nothing for a person in need so seriously, and how is leaving someone unhelped different from, and yet related to, actively harming them? (Matthew 25:41-43; also James 4:17; James 2:15-17)

Commentary

- "The crimes for which these souls are punished are those of omission and negligence" (Pulpit Commentary on Matthew 25:42-43)
- "Let it be observed here that the public ground of their condemnation is the neglect of duty, or because 'they did it not.'" (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 25:45)
- "People should be punished for neglect as well as for positive sin." (Barnes' Notes on Matthew 25:45)
- "The charge against the lost ones did not concern any obvious moral violation, but their indifferent attitude toward Jesus (and His people). Their indifference sealed their doom." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 25)
- "to do nothing is seen as the road to condemnation." (R. T. France, as quoted in David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 25)
- "there is no such thing as negative goodness" (Benson Commentary on Matthew 25:31)
- "what he wanted was not good wishes or kind words merely, but the acts to which good wishes and kind words prompt." (Barnes' Notes on James 2:15)

ICCEC Catechism

- "It is also a personal insult to God's majesty, love and kindness to us, and also to the image of God in our neighbor." (Q-241)
- "It is inseparable because, as the Holy Scripture testifies, faith without works is dead." (Q-10)

Summary

Jesus treats neglect as real sin, because love that does nothing is not love. The offenses punished here are omission and negligence (Pulpit Commentary). The stated ground of condemnation is neglected duty: they did it not (Barnes), and people are answerable for neglect as well as for outright sin (Barnes). The charge is not an obvious moral violation but indifference toward Jesus and His people, and that indifference sealed their doom (Guzik). Doing nothing is shown as the road to condemnation (R. T. France, quoted by Guzik). There is no such thing as merely negative goodness (Benson). A hungry person does not need kind words alone but the acts that kind words should lead to (Barnes). Harming someone and leaving someone unhelped are different acts, but both treat the person as if he does not matter, and Jesus takes both personally. Sin, whether by commission or omission, is an insult to God and to the image of God in our neighbor (Q-241), and faith without works is dead (Q-10).

Deep Dive

The King says to those on His left, "I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink" (Matthew 25:42). James writes, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). He gives an example: if someone says to a person without food or clothing, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but gives nothing, "what does it profit?" (James 2:16). "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17). The fire is described as "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41), while the kingdom was prepared for people (Matthew 25:34). All three scenes in Matthew 25 turn on something left undone: lamps not supplied with oil, a talent not put to use, and people in need not helped. If sins of omission are punished this way, open wrongdoing will not be treated more lightly (Pulpit Commentary).

Read before class: Matthew 25:41-46; James 2:14-17; James 4:17

C2. They ask, "Lord, when did we see You?" They had seen the need but not the King in it. What makes it easy to notice someone's need and still walk past, such as hurry, fear, awkwardness, or assuming someone else will help, and what would help you stop the next time? (Matthew 25:44-45; also Luke 10:30-37)

Commentary

- "It didn't matter to them that Jesus' brothers were hungry, thirsty, impoverished, sick, and imprisoned. They just didn't care." (GotQuestions.org, Who are the "least of these" in the Bible?)

- "It seemed so casual, as such opportunities always do to men who neglect them, and yet it was, in the purpose of God, the test-moment of each man's character and life." (Ellicott's Commentary on Luke 10:31)
- "He saw him lie, but came not near him." (Barnes' Notes on Luke 10:31)
- "those who have failed to see the needs of the disadvantaged have acted as though they have never seen Jesus." (Carla Works, Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46)
- "We can't afford to be indifferent towards the needy people all around us." (David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 25)
- "But against all these things covetousness once for all blinded them that were seized by it" (John Chrysostom, Homily 79 on Matthew)
- "they live for self alone, they own not their real relation to the whole family of man." (Pulpit Commentary on Matthew 25:45)

ICCEC Catechism

- "To be merciful is to love and forgive others as we have been forgiven and loved by Christ Jesus." (Q-270)
- "a life lived by grace through faith expressing itself in good works." (Q-7)

Summary

This is an application question. Common answers: we are in a hurry, we do not know what to say, we fear being taken advantage of or getting pulled into something bigger, we assume a family member, the church, or an agency will handle it, or we have seen so much need that we have stopped feeling it. Those on the left simply did not care that the Lord's brothers were hungry, sick, or in prison (GotQuestions). The moment on the road looked like chance, yet in God's purpose it was the test of each man's character (Ellicott); the priest saw the wounded man and would not come near (Barnes). Those who do not see the needs of the disadvantaged act as if they have never seen Jesus (Works). We cannot afford to be indifferent to the needy people all around us (Guzik). Greed blinded them (Chrysostom), and they lived for self alone (Pulpit Commentary). What helps: praying each morning to notice people, leaving margin in the day, deciding ahead of time to stop, and going with a friend. Mercy means loving others as Christ has loved us (Q-270), in a life of faith that shows itself in good works (Q-7).

Deep Dive

Those on the left ask, "Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?" (Matthew 25:44). He answers, "inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me" (Matthew 25:45).

In the parable of the Good Samaritan a priest "saw him" and "passed by on the other side," and a Levite "came and looked, and passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:31-32). The Samaritan also "saw him," but "he had compassion. So he went to him" (Luke 10:33-34). Jesus ends with "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). In Ezekiel God rebukes the strong sheep who push the weak aside, and He promises to "feed them in judgment" (Ezekiel 34:16). The outline warns that we can be busy with church activities and still miss the people God puts in front of us.

Read before class: Matthew 25:41-46; Luke 10:25-37; Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

C3. The scene ends with two destinations, "everlasting punishment" and "eternal life." If living faith shows itself in practical love, what would it look like for this Community Group to be a place where people are truly seen, welcomed, loved, and cared for, and what first step could the group take together? (Matthew 25:46; also 1 John 3:16-18; Galatians 6:9-10)

Commentary

- "if we ought to be willing to lay down our lives for others, we ought to be willing to make those comparatively smaller sacrifices which are necessary to relieve them in their distresses" (Barnes' Notes on 1 John 3:17)
- "In God's kingdom, no one is hungry, naked, sick, or alone." (Carla Works, Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46)
- "This rule welcomes those who have no status and seeks to serve others rather than exploit them." (Carla Works, Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46)
- "those who have seen Jesus no longer have any excuse to avoid 'the least of these.'" (Stanley Hauerwas, as quoted in Carla Works, Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46)
- "The core message of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats is that God's people will love others." (GotQuestions.org, What is the meaning of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats?)
- "Thus life and death, good and evil, the blessing and the curse, are set before us, that we may choose our way, and as our way so shall our end be." (Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on Matthew 25:31-46)
- "He is not the author of the curse." (Ellicott's Commentary on Matthew 25:41)

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- "We must be known for our love for other believers, loving them, sacrificially and unconditionally, as Jesus does." (Q-323)

- "All who are found in Jesus Christ will enjoy His presence eternally in His Kingdom" (Q-128)

Summary

This is an application question. Common answers: learning names and stories, noticing who is missing and calling them, making room for newcomers, bringing meals when someone is sick or grieving, praying for specific needs and following up, and serving together outside the group. First steps could include choosing one person or family to help this month, visiting a homebound member together, or each naming one act of service and reporting back next week. If Christ laid down His life for us, we should be willing to make the much smaller sacrifices that relieve others in their distress (Barnes). In God's kingdom no one is hungry, naked, sick, or alone (Works), and His rule welcomes people who have no status (Works). Those who have seen Jesus no longer have any excuse to avoid the least of these (Stanley Hauerwas, quoted by Works). The core message is that God's people will love others (GotQuestions). Life and death are set before us so that we may choose our way (Matthew Henry), and God is not the author of the curse (Ellicott). Disciples must be known for sacrificial love (Q-323), and all who are found in Christ will enjoy His presence forever (Q-128).

Deep Dive

The passage ends, "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). The same Greek word stands behind "everlasting" and "eternal," so the punishment lasts as long as the life (Adam Clarke, quoted by Guzik). John writes, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us," and asks how the love of God can abide in someone who "sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him" (1 John 3:16-17). "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Paul encourages, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9). Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). The outline's group commitment asks each person to name one specific act of service for the coming week.

Read before class: Matthew 25:41-46; 1 John 3:16-18; Galatians 6:9-10

Bringing It All Together

This closing page gathers the whole study into a few lines you can carry out of the room. Read it aloud at the end of class, or come back to it during the week.

The big picture

On the last Sunday of the church year, Jesus shows how the story ends: the Son of Man on His throne, every nation gathered before Him, and a shepherd separating sheep from goats (Matthew 25:31-33). What surprises both groups is where the King has been all along. He was with the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner, and He takes what was done for them, or left undone, as done or left undone to Himself (Matthew 25:40, 45).

Key takeaways

1. **Jesus is King, not only Savior.** The One who was about to be crucified is the Judge of all nations, and He claims every part of life: our time, our money, our words, and our relationships (A1, A2).
2. **There is no neutral ground.** In the end there are only two sides. Anything that takes first place over Him, even a good thing, has become a rival king (A3).
3. **The King is met in the least.** He counts kindness to the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner as kindness to Himself: "you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40) (B1, B2).
4. **The love He looks for is ordinary and unselfconscious.** A meal, a drink, a welcome, clothing, a visit. The righteous were not keeping score and were surprised to learn He had noticed (B2, B3).
5. **Doing nothing is not innocent.** Those on the left are not charged with cruelty. They saw the need and walked past, and the King says, "you did not do it to Me" (Matthew 25:45) (C1, C2).
6. **Mercy does not buy the kingdom. It shows whose we are.** The kingdom is an inheritance, "prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34), and living faith shows itself "in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18) (C3).

One sentence to remember

When you serve the least, you serve the King.

A verse to keep

"And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" (Matthew 25:40)

This week

Choose one person, one need, and one concrete act, and do it before the group meets again. At the end of each day, ask: Lord, where did I see You today, and where did I walk past You?

Sources

Source	Where to find it
ICCEC Catechism (2014), cited by Q-number	iccec.org PDF
John Chrysostom, Homily 79 on Matthew	New Advent
Carla Works (2023) and Greg Carey (2014), Working Preacher on Matthew 25:31-46 (Works quotes Stanley Hauerwas)	Works, Carey
David Guzik, Enduring Word on Matthew 25 (this page quotes D. A. Carson, R. T. France, and Adam Clarke)	Matthew 25
GotQuestions.org: the Parable of the Sheep and Goats; the least of these; Jesus is Lord	Sheep and Goats, Least of these, Jesus is Lord
Matthew Henry, Ellicott, Barnes, Benson, the Pulpit Commentary, the Cambridge Bible, and the Expositor's Greek Testament on Matthew 25	25:31, 25:34, 25:35, 25:40, 25:41, 25:42, 25:45
Ellicott and Barnes on other verses	Matthew 6:24, Luke 10:31, Hebrews 13:2, James 2:15, 1 John 3:17
New King James Version (NKJV)	Bible Gateway