

Seeing and Serving Those Around You

Matthew 25:31–40

October 25, 2026

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Throughout my life I've been involved in numerous ministries serving people. I realize that none of it has been possible without the leading of the Holy Spirit. Early in my ministry there were mission work trips with students. We did a lot of construction work. There have been mission work trips with adults. We did a lot of construction. But it was always the power of the Holy Spirit that made it happen. I've spent time ministering in jails. I've ministered with the homeless, addicts, alcoholics, and people who were dying. The Holy Spirit was doing the work, I was along for the ride. There have been a number of ministries with children including Vacation Bible School. I wasn't about the Bible stories I told or the songs that I sang. It was the work of God's Holy Spirit. Through all of this activity and ministry I remember the faces of people. Those faces are what stick with me more than any of the work.

When I read today's passage there is guilt and shame. I don't always see Jesus in the people who have needs. My most frequent posture in life is doing my own thing. So, I'm guilty of not seeing people who are in need. That brings me to the place that when I see someone in need, I don't always respond. My lack of response is related to several things. I'm too busy. That's someone else's job. They aren't as bad off as they act. They'll just waste the money on something else. But is it about the money, my schedule, or anyone's schedule?

Matthew 25:31–40 (NIV) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."

Although, this passage is about the judgment of God, we're talking about how to live for Jesus. Let me tell you about the judgment of God. It is coming. One day Jesus will return and like He separates the sheep and the goats we need to apply that image sinners and saints. Jesus will put those who love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength and love their neighbors on His right. He will put every pretender, every half committed, and fully sinning sinner on His left. You can take this image of sheep and goats literally. This is not just a picture and a story. This will happen. Everything Jesus says in these verses will take place. This is a straightforward declaration of fact and truth.

Faith in Jesus will be measured by action, compassion, mercy, grace, and love. Some might think they can do all of these things and get into heaven and not love Jesus. But they are mistaken. The love for Jesus in a person's heart will determine their actions. Those who don't act with love, grace, mercy, compassion don't love Jesus. No one can love Jesus and not love their neighbor. To love Jesus is to love one another. Jesus will judge every person from every nation based upon their love for Him taking action. This is not about being saved by your good deeds. This is about your love for Jesus producing good deeds.

Don't think about the judgment, think about living for Jesus. Just as I described it, too many of us think about judgment and ask if we've done enough. That's being focused on your works and not on Jesus. Loving Jesus results in an overwhelming, unstoppable desire to love others. Love is more than we read or see. Love involves a ministry of action. Love is living all day long like Jesus, day after day.

The love of Jesus touched people. Jesus touched the sinners. Jesus touched the sick. Jesus touched the hungry and thirsty. Jesus touched the lonely. Jesus touched those who were imprisoned. Jesus lived all day long, day after day speaking the truth. He lived ministering to the needs of people. He touched their lives because He loved them. He saw their need and met their need. He helped them because He decided they were worthy of His love. He ministered to their bodies, their minds, so He could minister to their spirits. As God loved Him, He loved the people He encountered.

Matthew 25:34–36 (NIV) “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’”

Everybody has the same needs, are you looking for Jesus when we see people in need?

Hunger, thirst, being a stranger, naked, sickness, and imprisonment are all things we seek to avoid. I have enough food in my house to for several days. I am blessed. I have water that is filtered and cold in my fridge. I am blessed. I have friends in several communities and states. I am blessed. I have a dresser and a closet full of clothing and shoes. I am blessed. My heart tests come back that it's in good shape. I am blessed. I have never been to jail or prison except to visit someone. I am blessed.

So far in my sixty-seven years I have avoided everything on the list. I know that not everyone can say the same. That is why I say that I am blessed. I have been protected by the Lord. God has been and is good to me. Thank you Jesus.

There are people in my family who have illnesses, who have been to jail. Some of them were bootleggers about ninety years ago. Some of them didn't pay child support. Some of them took the car without dad's permission. How about you? Have you been protected and blessed by God against the six curses of the world? Do you have family who have experienced any these six curses?

We may not want to have anything to do with people with these six cursed life experiences. Since hunger and thirst are unwelcome situations we do anything we can to avoid both. We may go even further and try to stay away from people who are hungry and thirsty. When I put it that way, that sounds terrible.

Our favorite list of things doesn't include talking to strangers or visiting people in jail. We despise the flu so much that we get a shot every year. Nobody likes the flu. My son and daughter-in-law eat healthy and take supplements so they don't get sick. Our culture is very conscious about the clothing people wear.

These things are the six curses of the world. When someone experiences any of them we apply the ancient attitude of guilt. The person must be cursed. Some people will think and even say that they are cursed. They can't explain their bad situation and so they may even blame God for their condition.

How did Jesus respond to the those afflicted with any or all of these six curses? He met them in their need and ministered to them. He not only saw them, but He went to them. While He was with them, He did something about their situation. I said this before, when reading this passage I can easily feel ashamed.

Matthew 25:37–39 (NIV) “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a

stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

When we see the need through Jesus' eyes, we see ourselves serving with Jesus. His ministry was about serving others. He demonstrated serving many, many times during His life. We talked about the very moment when He washed His disciples feet. That was the work of a slave, but God's Son, Jesus did it. Jesus saw the work of a servant, the acting of serving others in need as an honor. He didn't draw a line in the sand, saying that's unworthy work. For the Son of Man, all work, all service was worthy.

Jesus always saw the person. The person was being attacked by the devil. Don't be surprised that I said the devil was attacking. Let me explain. The person in need was being twisted and abused by the power of sin in the world. The person may have been innocent of any sin, but the devil saw them as someone to afflict. That's what the devil does. He looks for people to afflict. The person may have made one bad choice after another, tempted and seduced by the devil. But for one choice here or there in our own lives we could be cursed by one of the six curses of the world.

Jesus came to set each person free from the work of the devil. Throughout His ministry Jesus set people free from hunger by giving them food. He set people free by healing their afflictions. He set people free from the prisons of these afflictions.

Jesus had a purpose in life. His purpose was to defeat the devil, sin and it's punishment. Jesus demonstrated His power over the work of the devil. Jesus demonstrated His power over sin by taking it upon Himself on the cross. Jesus defeated the punishment of sin, which is death, by rising from the dead and ascending to heaven.

To serve with Jesus is second to being saved by Jesus. The greatness of being saved is immeasurable. Nothing compares to being set free from the power of sin. Nothing compares to being forgiven of rejecting God and then being made a child of God. Nothing compares to the power of the Holy Spirit coming into your life. Nothing compares to the hope of life eternal in heaven. This is your salvation. You did nothing to earn it. Jesus gave it to you as a gift.

Second to this gift of Jesus' salvation is living in the promise of heaven and the power of the Holy Spirit everyday. That is leaving your life like Jesus. Living your life seeing the world as Jesus sees it. Jesus sees the world in need. People are in need of salvation. People are in need of compassion, mercy, grace, and love. Jesus is ministering to people. When we see people like Jesus sees them we will minister with Jesus.

Matthew 25:40 (NIV)

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

As disciples who make disciples our greatest challenge is to see Jesus in those we meet. As a Christian you have a choice to make. You can choose to live as a person forgiven of your sins. Or you can choose to live as a disciple of Jesus seeing Him at work with the hungry, thirsty, the lonely, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned.

The first choice is to know you are loved by Jesus. The second choice is to know you are loved by Jesus and you love others the way Jesus loves them. When we choose to love others as Jesus loves them we are willing to make sacrifices. We are willing to give our time. It takes time to help other

people. We are willing to put forward the effort. It takes lots of energy to help other people. We are willing to use our resources. Helping others requires resources.

Thank you Jesus, we don't serve others, make sacrifices by our own power. Jesus has given us His Holy Spirit. As disciples who make disciples we take a step of faith following the leading of the Holy Spirit and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The sacrifices aren't sacrifices they are offerings we give to Jesus. We are offering ourselves to work alongside Jesus as He ministers to people who are hungry, thirsty, lonely, naked, sick, and imprisoned.

As the Holy Spirit opens your eyes you will see the people around you – family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and strangers – with the eyes of Jesus. That is you will see people with compassion, mercy, grace, and love. You will respond to their needs. You will love them because Jesus loves you.

As a sinner you have a choice to make. You can be a goat standing on Jesus' left. He will put you on His left when He returns. He has looked at your life. He has seen your sin, your selfishness, you rejecting Him. He has seen your lack of compassion, your lack of mercy and grace, your lack of love. He knows that you care only about yourself. He has seen your false attempts to be good, to be nice, to helpful. He knows when you are pretending, when you want to get something in return.

But when Jesus returns you can be on His right. You can be right with Jesus. You can have a relationship with Jesus. You can have eternal life in heaven. You can offer yourself to Jesus. You can say to Jesus that you have failed to trust Him. You can ask Jesus to forgive you, enter your life, and transform you to be like Him.

Jesus has taken away your sin when He died on the cross. But you need to give it to Him. When you hand over your sin to Jesus proclaiming your love for Him, He will raise you from the dead just like He rose from the dead.

You will be filled with compassion, mercy, grace, and love for the people in your world.

What choice are you going to make?

Will you choose your way of life?

Will you choose Jesus?