

Kingdom Life

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 25

Focus Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

Key Verses: "The king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food...'" Matthew 25:34-35

MATTHEW 25:31-46 (NRSV UE)

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.

32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,

33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,

35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink?

38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing?

39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

40 And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'

41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,

42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food,

MATTHEW 25:31-46 (KJV)

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no

I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,
 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

44 Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?'

45 Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

46 And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life."

meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

KEY TERMS

- **Superfluous** – Unnecessary details.
- **Mutuality** – A two-way relationship; each party caring for the other.
- **CUNY** – City University of New York.
- **Generosity** – A willingness to give freely to people in need or groups serving such people.

INTRODUCTION

It is human nature to classify people according to their outward appearances, wealth, and/or their social standing. Likewise, we show a tendency to disregard people on the ground floor of society. However, the text shows that poor and needy people are important to God. Further, narratives like that of the Good Samaritan show that God gives us excellent credit ratings

when we care for needy people, as if we were caring for Christ himself.

These considerations make our charitable contributions an important aspect of

our Christian service. The text highlights the importance of our charitable giving by putting it higher than religious rituals (Matthew 7). So, what is the key principle to bear in mind? It is this. All we do in the church building in the name of praise and worship is important. We must do our best to maintain true corporate worship and fellowship. But, of

equal or higher importance is how we treat people in need. Other things being equal, the way we care for the weak and oppressed in our society is our ticket into the kingdom of God. This lesson will prompt believers to examine how well

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they reflect this in their daily activities.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

In this passage, Jesus used the familiar imagery of sheep and goats. These mental pictures were familiar to Israel. The reference to sheep appears about 500 times in the scriptures. Goats have about 150 mentions.

Jesus added to the sheep and goats reference another

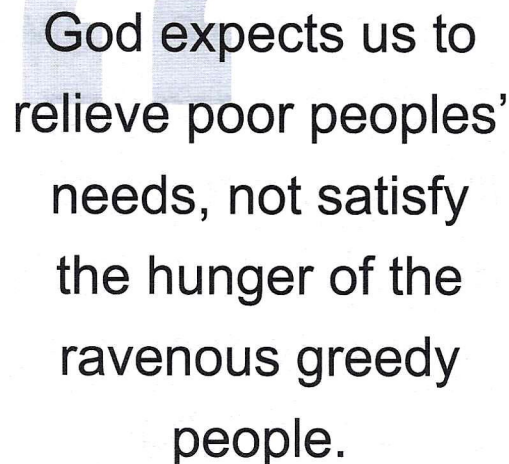
familiar imagery: the idea of two possible paths through life. Under this “Two Ways” philosophy, people who lived wise, God-fearing lives were on the righteous way. People who lived selfish, evil lives were on the evil losing way. Preachers and teachers, please take note. Although understanding the Bible text today may

be challenging, when Jesus taught, the masses easily understood his messages. Our difficulty in grasping the Bible text arises because we live outside the culture that prevailed then.

Interpreting the focal passage of 25:35-45 demands surgical skills. Without a doubt, the section speaks clearly to sacrificial generosity. And every believer should take that seriously. Still, that passage is

also a dam through which unscrupulous ministers release unbridled abuse. The key to grasping the passage’s true intent is to look at the object of the giving: the people who receive the fruits of the sacrificial giving. It is the poor and needy. It is not the greedy! The passage is crystal clear on this. The details in the passage, food, drink, housing, are not superfluous and cannot be casually generalized. God expects us to relieve poor peoples’

needs, not satisfy the hunger of the ravenous greedy people.



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The passage also demonstrates how the master teacher used aspects of the prevailing culture in his teachings. Hospitality was (and continues to be) a core value in the entire region of Palestine. For centuries, hospitality to strangers was a matter of personal honor. It was

just the right thing to do. Hebrews 13:2 underscored this importance. We may be entertaining God’s messengers when we entertain strangers.

The nature of the needs Jesus highlighted are all physical. Underscore that Jesus was addressing his core disciples and others who would later make up the church. Without doubt, Christ is signaling that our love for God must find expression in how we cater to the physical needs of

the people. The church's primary mission is undoubtedly spiritual: saving souls and guiding people to eternal life. Yet, as Matthew 22:39 highlights, the second mission is equally important. Believers cannot emphasize the spiritual and ignore the physical aspects of ministry. Passages like Acts 2:42-47 and James 2:15-16 tell believers how the early church strove to uphold both arms of ministry. Like love and marriage, as the song says, both aspects (spiritual and physical) must go together like the old horse and carriage.

Even devout Christians struggle to give generously to worthy causes. This is a stark reality even though scriptures adamantly support the blessedness of giving to the needy and charitable causes according to our resources. Before you take issue with that statement, look at the research results. According to available data, the percentage of Christians who give consistently (tithing, etc.) ranges between 3% and 25%. This is so despite passages like Proverbs 11:24-25, Luke 6:37-38, and 2 Corinthians 8:12-15 which hails the blessedness of giving. But note that 2 Corinthians 8 sets useful rails to stop greedy people from exploiting others. Forcing people to give without respecting

those guardrails can be exploitative. Jesus certainly does not support that.

SANKOFA

Often when we talk of charitable giving it is a dry subject without human character. Adding a human face will change the tone of the conversations. Consider the story of Edward (a fictitious name), a student at CUNY in Brooklyn, New York.

Edward and I ran into each other on a train and started a casual conversation. During the chat, I learned, among other things, that "life was hard" for Edward. Yet, he was making a commendable effort to "keep himself out of trouble" and to maintain himself at college. Then he threw a glowing praise on the City Harvest pantry in New

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York. Edward was sure he would have attended school hungry on many days without City Harvest. Every week he goes to City Harvest and collects a supply of grocery items. Those items form the core of his meals each week.

But it was not only the food he praised. Edward appreciated how the people at City Harvest treated him. They knew him by name and seemed always to welcome him. As he put it, the workers "never made

him feel like a beggar.” And he hoped that one day when he gets his life sorted out, he will be able to do for other people what City Harvest was doing for him. Countless Edwards, in our world, are struggling for food, clothes, and shelter. These are the people we should try to help. These are the people Jesus identified in the set text.

CASE STUDY

Most recent published studies on people giving to churches and other charities agree that charitable giving continues to slide sharply downhill. The usual responses to this disturbing trend is for church and charity leaders to scream the traditional message about the nobility of giving. However, in 2024, it appears that people are tired of the screaming and shaming messages and are ignoring them.

Perhaps a better approach to lift the level of charitable giving is to address the concerns that kill people's inclination to help needy people. *The Classy Blog* (<https://www.classy.org>) under the title “The 4 Barriers That Keep Your Donors From Giving” looked at the generosity killers. The four factors identified in the

blog were the *Fear of Regret*, *Bystander Effect*, *Donor Efficiency*, and the *Paradox of Choice*.

In looking at the *Fear of Regret*, we noted this comment: “An important part of fighting the fear of regret is to present your organization as trustworthy and upstanding.” This is the traditional trust factor. People need assurance that what they give will serve the needs as represented. The *Bystander Effect* calls to mind the age-old adage that the next “Samaritan” will offer the help needed. In *Donor Efficiency*, we noted that people seek a guarantee that “their gift matters and is having an impact.” With the *Paradox of Choice*, the writer said, “Too many choices make it hard to choose.” Each charity must realize it is fighting for a slice of the donation dollar.

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Other postings from Barna and Pew researchers give insightful information on what is happening with charitable giving today. It seems wise that church leaders (and other charities) should use these findings when formulating strategies to attract, maintain, and improve the charity dollar. From all indications, the age has passed where leaders can set

income budgets by whims and fancies and coerce people to fill them. Budgeting for charities today is a professional skill that leaders of charities must learn and practice. Generally, people still want to give and will give when leaders address their concerns and allay their fears.

LIFE APPLICATION

Often, we help people who show no gratitude for our help. However, there are those precious times when people we help show appreciation. Reflect on such a time when someone said to you, "What you did for me sure helped me a lot" or something similar. Let that occasion remind you of the impact your giving can have on the lives of others. Were you surprised that your small contribution made such a lasting impact?

Make lists of people, charities, and causes you feel compelled to support. Consider making firm plans to help them with time and/or money. A written plan, however rough, helps us to find time and earmark resources for the causes dear to our hearts. Without a plan, our donations tend to be erratic.

Usually, when people hear about donations,

they think about donating money. But in everyday situations, donations of time and skills are more important than dollars. Consider the variety of ways in which you can make non-monetary contributions. These include serving at a soup kitchen, carrying meals to shut-ins, reading to people in a hospital, or helping senior citizens with household chores. Look at your availability of "free time" and consider

committing time slots to one or more of these activities.

The sheep in the text got a warm welcome into the kingdom based on their charity to poor and needy people. When you consider this teaching, what impact does it have on you? Are you confident that you already have your "sheep" status, or do you have to take steps to ensure you are in that group? Whatever is your assessment, know that the door is

open for you to join the sheepfold. Make the matter a point of prayer and take the steps as directed by the Holy Spirit. You may have to make major lifestyle and budget adjustments, but for the prize set before you, it is all worth it.

Note that the reward goes to the sheep for caring for the "least of Christ's brothers

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and sisters” around them. Accordingly, consider how you presently identify people within that class. More than likely their religious and political views, and lifestyles, you do not share. Consider how, despite these differences, you can still offer these people the help and care they may need.

Questions

1. Jesus' comments in the text focused on direct giving to people in need. To what extent should we engage in direct giving to people in need?
2. How do you identify the giving

opportunities you should accept?

3. How do you identify people who genuinely need help (as opposed to swindlers)?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: “We Give Thee but Thine Own,” *AMEC Hymnal* #645

Closing Prayer: Gracious Father, help me to identify people who genuinely need my help, and stir in me the heart to give to them according to my resources of time, and money. This I ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

February 24–March 2

Monday	Revelation 1:3-8 (We Are Priests)
Tuesday	Psalms 106:36-48 (Give Thanks to God's Holy Name)
Wednesday	Leviticus 19:1-10 (Be Holy)
Thursday	Leviticus 19:11-18 (Love Your Neighbor as Yourself)
Friday	Revelation 20:1-6 (Priests of God and Christ)
Saturday	Micah 6:1-8 (Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly)
Sunday	Exodus 19:1-14 (Treasured Possession)