

Serving The Least

Matt 25:31-46

SS Lesson for 02/15/2015

Devotional Scripture: James 2:13-20

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From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson examines how we as Christians should be **Serving the Least** because Jesus will one day judge for this. The **study's aim** is to sense the importance Jesus puts on caring for the helpless and needy and to realize the great number of people around us who cannot care for themselves. The **study's application** is to minister physically and spiritually to the helpless people around us. (*Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*).

Key Verse: Matt 25:40

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.'

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

When the Lord returns “in His glory,” He will judge not only the nation Israel (as in the Parable of the 10 Virgins [vv. 1-13] and the Parable of the Talents [vv. 14-30]) but also the Gentiles. This is not the same as the great white throne judgment, which involves only the wicked and which follows the Millennium (Rev. 20:13-15). The judgment of the Gentiles will occur 1,000 years earlier in order to determine who will and will not enter the kingdom. The words **the nations** should be translated “the Gentiles.” These are all **people**, other than Jews, who have lived through the Tribulation period (cf. Joel 3:2,12). They will be judged individually, not as national groups. They are described as a mingling of **sheep** and **goats**, which the Lord will separate. **The King** “on His throne” (v. 31) will extend an invitation **to those on His right** hand, the sheep, to enter **the kingdom** God had **prepared... since the Creation of the world**. The basis of their entrance is seen in their actions, for they provided food, **drink**, clothing, and care for the King (vv. 35-36). The King’s statement will prompt the sheep to respond that they do not recall ever having ministered directly to the King (vv. 37-39). **The King will** answer that they performed these services for **the least of these brothers of Mine**, and by so doing were ministering to the King (v. 40). The expression “these brothers” must refer to a third group that is neither sheep nor goats. The only possible group would be Jews, physical brothers of the Lord. In view of the distress in the Tribulation period, it is clear that any believing Jew will have a difficult time surviving (cf. 24:15-21). The forces of the world dictator will be doing everything possible to exterminate all Jews (cf. Rev. 12:17). A Gentile going out of his way to assist a Jew in the Tribulation will mean that Gentile has become a believer in Jesus Christ during the Tribulation. By such a stand and action, a believing Gentile will put his life in jeopardy. His works will not save him; but his works will reveal that he is redeemed. To the goats **on His left** hand (cf. v. 33) the King will pronounce judgment. They will be told, **Depart... into the eternal fire prepared** not for men but **for the devil and his angels** (cf. “the kingdom prepared,” v. 34). The basis of their judgment will be their failure to extend mercy to the remnant of Jewish believers during the Tribulation. Their lack of righteous works will evidence their unconcern (vv. 42-44; cf. vv. 35-36). Such individuals will sympathize with the world dictator and support his cause. They will be removed from the earth and will be cast into “eternal fire” (v. 41) to undergo **eternal punishment** (v. 46). With all wickedness removed in the various judgments at the Second Advent, the kingdom will begin on earth with only saved individuals in physical bodies constituting the earthly kingdom as the King’s subjects. Glorified saints from Old Testament times and the church, the bride of Christ, will also be present to share in the reign of the King of kings. In this extended prophetic sermon, Jesus answered His disciples’ questions about the sign of His coming and the end of the Age (24:4-31). He also presented practical lessons for those who will be living at that time (24:32-51), encouraging them to faithfulness, watchfulness, and preparedness. By way of application these lessons are relevant to all believers in any Age. He concluded by pointing out the establishment of the kingdom and the judgment of Jews (25:1-30) and of Gentiles (vv. 31-46).

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

“Appearances can be deceiving.” “Things are not always what they seem.” We have all heard those old sayings. And we can all name situations in which they have proven true. A piece of fruit looks fresh, but inside it is rotten. A book

looks interesting, but we discover it is not after reading a few pages. We size a person up by appearances, only to discover later that the person is very different from our first impression. Appearances are especially deceiving when we assume that the real truth is only what we see with our eyes. As believers in Almighty God and followers of Jesus Christ, we affirm that there is an invisible reality that changes everything. What we see is real and true—when we see rightly. But what we cannot see can be just as real and true, able to change what we understand about what we see. Today's text describes how God will one day show everyone the unseen reality that many miss.

Today's lesson occurs in the context of Jesus' final week in Jerusalem. After delivering a blistering condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23), Jesus instructed his disciples about the real nature of his reign as king (Matthew 24). Evil would remain active while the good news of God's kingdom was proclaimed to the world. The disciples would face hardship when a great siege would be laid against Jerusalem a generation after Jesus' warning, an event that took place in AD 70. Such events were not to be identified with the fullness of Jesus' reign as king, however. That would come at an unknown time (Matthew 24:36), a time when he would bring final judgment on the wicked and the full measure of blessing on his people. Until then, Jesus' followers are to remain alert and faithful, like servants who diligently do their master's work while he is away, knowing that he can return at any time (24:45-51; 25:14-30). They must be prepared for the possibility that that return will be long in coming (25:1-13). While waiting for the full appearance of Jesus' kingdom, his people are to remain utterly devoted. Today's lesson offers an important contribution to this emphasis.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Judgment And Separation On Whether Needs Were Met (Matt 25:31-33)

31 "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.
32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.
33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

God gives the judgment to Jesus (31)

God entrusted all judgment to Jesus (John 5:22)

22 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,

God gave the judgment to Jesus because He loved Him (John 3:35)

35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

Jesus judges because He is the Son of God (John 5:26-27)

26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

God granted Jesus authority to judge (John 17:2)

2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

God appointed Jesus as judge (Acts 10:42)

42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

All people will be judged (32)

Man is destined to face judgment (Heb 9:27)

27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

Jesus will bring His angels with Him to judge (Jude 14-15)

"See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

God established His throne for judgment of the world (Ps 9:7-8)

7 The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. 8 He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice.

All will stand before God's judgment (Rom 14:10)

10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

All are accountable to God for what was done in the body (2 Cor 5:10)

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Separation of the righteous and the wicked (33)

Man will not separate, but only God and His angels at the right time (Matt 13:36-43)

36 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. 40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

God will separate like a winnowing fork separates wheat from chaff (Matt 3:12)

12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

God will separate those who are not prepared (Matt 22:11-14)

11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. 13 "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Judgment of Those Who Met Others Needs (Matt 25:34-40)

34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of 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 drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;

36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?
38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?
39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'
40 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.'

Those who have met other's needs inherit the kingdom of God (34)

Meeting other's needs means loving our neighbors, which results in gaining the inheritance of the kingdom (James 2:5-8)

5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

The supplying of other's physical needs brings about a blessing of the kingdom (James 2:15-16)

15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

Entering God's kingdom sometimes requires giving up our possessions (Matt 19:21-23)

21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Sometimes we may have to give others all we have to inherit the kingdom (Mark 12:41-44)

41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

Those who have met other's needs took actions (35-36)

A Drink of Water (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

It has been over forty years since the movie *Ben-Hur* won the Academy Award for "Best Picture." The movie was an adaptation of the book written by Civil War General Lew Wallace (1827–1905). Many people do not realize that the subtitle of the book is *A Tale of the Christ*. Two of the most compelling scenes in the movie focus on the giving of drinks of water. Early in the movie, the Romans are leading Judah Ben-Hur on a forced march. He has been denied food and water; he is terribly weak. A man steps forward to offer Ben-Hur a drink of water. We never see the man's face, but it is obvious that it is Jesus. Much later in the story, Ben-Hur has returned to Jerusalem. He follows along as Jesus is led through the streets of the city and out to Golgotha. In one of the cinema's most touching moments, Ben-Hur is able to give a drink of water to Jesus after he has fallen beneath the weight of the cross. Lew Wallace wrote fiction, but the inclusion of the opportunity for Ben-Hur to return the kindness of Jesus may have been more than a brilliant literary device. It may have been General Wallace's gentle reminder to us that every opportunity to meet the needs of another is an opportunity to minister to Jesus by ministering to someone he loves.

Meeting other's needs requires both love and actions (1 John 3:18)

18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Faith or intentions to help others without action is dead (James 2:17)

17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Helping others means putting our faith into practice (Matt 7:24-27)

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

We must not be deceived, we must actually meet other's needs to really be obedient to God (James 1:22)

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Only through obedience to God's command to help others will we be counted righteous (Rom 2:13)

13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Knowing we should help others, yet not doing it is a sin (James 4:17)

17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

We must take advantage of every opportunity to help others (Gal 6:10)

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Those who have met other's needs did so without expectations (37-39)

We should never expect repayment for helping others (Luke 6:34)

34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

The true repayment for helping others will come at the resurrection (Luke 14:12-14)

12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

When we help others, sometimes we should do it without letting others know we did it (Matt 6:2-4)

3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Even if we have to spend extra, we should do it out of love versus expecting repayment (Luke 10:33-35)

33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

Those who have met other's needs served God (40)

Whoever is kind to the needy honors God (Prov 14:31)

31 He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

Those who are kind to the poor are counted as being kind to God (Prov 19:17)

17 He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.

Serving others is part of being God's disciple and servant (Matt 10:42)

42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

We must always serve others as if we were serving God (Ephesians 6:7)

7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,

Judgment of Those Who Did Not Meet Others Needs (Matt 25:41-46)

41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;

43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

44 "Then they also will answer Him, saying, '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?'

45 Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch 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 everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Those who have not met other's needs are cursed (41)

Cursed because of not being obedient to God (Gal 3:10)

10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

Cursed because of not providing for others, especially family (1 Tim 5:8)

8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Cursed because of being selfish and greedy and trying to devour the needy (Prov 30:11-14)

11 "There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers; 12 those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth; 13 those whose eyes are ever so haughty, whose glances are so disdainful; 14 those whose teeth are swords and whose jaws are set with knives to devour the poor from the earth, the needy from among mankind.

Cursed because of nullifying God's word (Matt 15:5-6)

5 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' 6 he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

Those who have not met other's needs ignored their duty (42-44)

Ignoring duty through intentional sin (James 4:17)

17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

Ignoring duty through perceived and misplaced priorities (Luke 10:30-33)

Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

Ignoring duty through shutting out the cries of others (Prov 21:13)

13 If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.

Ignoring duty through claimed ignorance, yet God knows the mind and heart (Prov 24:12)

12 If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?

Ignoring duty through not having the love of God indwelling (1 John 3:17)

17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

Those who have not met other's needs will receive everlasting punishment (45-46)

Punishment through receiving the rewards in this world versus the next (Luke 16:19-23)

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

Punishment for doing evil (John 5:28-29)

28 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

Punishment because of not being obedient to God (2 Thess 1:7-9)

8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

Punishment for being a hypocrite (Matt 23:13)

13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Thomas L. Constable

The King's judgment of the Nations 25:31-46

Jesus concluded the Olivet Discourse with further revelation about the judgment that will take place at the end of the present age when He returns. He had referred to it often in the discourse, but now He made it a special subject of explanation. This judgment will occur when the King returns to earth at the end of the Tribulation to set up His kingdom.

As we have seen, Matthew stressed judgment in his Gospel (3:12; 6:2, 5, 16; 7:24-27; 13:30, 48-49; 18:23-34; 20:1-16; 21:33-41; 22:1-14; 24:45-51; 25:1-12, 14-30). This is not unusual since the Old Testament predicted that judgment would precede the messianic kingdom, and Matthew stressed the kingdom. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus

concluded this discourse that reveals events leading up to the inauguration of the kingdom by explaining the judgment that will precede it.

The New Testament teaches that there will be two distinct judgments relative to the kingdom. One will occur just before the messianic kingdom begins and another will follow at its end. The one at the end is the great white throne judgment when God will send all unbelievers to hell (Rev. 20:11-15). Notice some differences between these two judgments that indicate their distinctness. First, the first will not involve a resurrection of unbelievers but will deal with unbelievers alive then on the earth, but the second will involve a resurrection of unbelievers. The word "nations" (i.e., Gentiles, Gr. *ethne*) never refers to the dead elsewhere in Scripture. Second, the first judgment will involve three different kinds of people—the sheep, the goats, and Jesus' brethren—whereas the second will involve only the wicked (Rev. 20:13-15). Third, the first will result in some inheriting the kingdom and others getting eternal punishment, but the second will result in everyone judged going into the lake of fire. Fourth, the first happens at the beginning of the messianic (millennial) kingdom, but the second happens at its end.

This pericope rounds off Jesus' instructions about the future in a way similar to how 10:40-42 completes Jesus' charge concerning His apostles' mission in Israel (10:5-42). It is the parable of the sheep and the goats.

25:31 This verse fixes the time of the judgment described in the following verses at the beginning of Jesus' messianic reign (cf. Dan. 7:9-14, 22-27). Nowhere in this discourse did Jesus explicitly identify Himself as the Son of Man. However since He used that title in answer to the disciples' questions in verse 3 the inference is inescapable (cf. Zech. 14:5; Joel 3:1-12). Jesus becomes the eschatological Judge that the Old Testament identified as God. Jesus again referred to His coming with heavenly glory (16:27; 24:30; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:8). Jesus will sit on His earthly throne as Judge and King (cf. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 12:2).

25:32-33 Usually "the nations" (Gr. *ta ethne*) refers to Gentiles distinguished from Jews (e.g., Luke 21:24; Acts 14:16). However the phrase "all the nations" is often more inclusive referring to all people including the Jews (cf. Rom. 16:26; Rev. 15:4). Here it probably refers to all people living on earth when Jesus establishes His kingdom (cf. 28:19; Mark 13:10). Everyone will have heard the gospel of the kingdom preached during the Tribulation (24:14). In Jesus' day, shepherds separated the sheep from the goats in their flocks for various reasons at various times. Also, sheep and goats in the Middle East look more alike than they do elsewhere.

25:34 The identification of the King with the Son of Man (v. 31) recalls Daniel 7:13-14 where the Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days (God the Father) to receive a kingdom. The purpose of Jesus separating humanity into two groups at the beginning of the kingdom is to determine whom He will admit to the kingdom and whom He will exclude (cf. vv. 41, 46). The Father blesses (Gr. *eulogemeno*i, cf. 21:9; 23:39) some by allowing them to enter the kingdom. They now enter into their inheritance, a term that presupposes relationship with the Father. The inheritance involves the blessings God will give them in the kingdom that will vary depending on their service during the Tribulation (cf. vv. 14-23, 28-29).

Jesus' description of the kingdom as what God had prepared from the foundation of the world is significant. The rule of Messiah on the earth over all humankind has been part of God's plan since creation. This shows its central place in God's program for humanity. Its establishment will be the fulfillment of many promises and covenants that God gave to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15), to Abraham (Gen. 12; 15; 17; 21), to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16), and to the nation of Israel (Ezek. 34:20-31; Jer. 31:31-40; Zech. 10:5-12).

25:35-40 Jesus clarified the basis for judgment then. It would be reception or rejection of the King as seen in people's reception or rejection of the King's brothers. The King's brothers are probably His faithful disciple slaves who fulfill His will by preaching the gospel of the kingdom during the Tribulation (cf. 12:48-49; 28:10; Isa. 58:7). Most of these will be Jews including the 144,000, though some may be Gentile converts as well (cf. Rev. 7:1-8; 14:1-5). They will have become believers following the Rapture since all believers alive on the earth when the Rapture happens will go to be with Jesus then. Other interpreters have identified these brethren as all the needy of the world, all Jews, or Christian apostles and missionaries.

"Those described here are people who have lived through the great tribulation, a time of unparalleled anti-Semitism, when the majority of Jews in the land will be killed. Under these

circumstances, if a Gentile befriends a Jew to the extent of feeding and clothing and visiting him, it could only mean that he is a believer in Jesus Christ and recognizes the Jews as the chosen people."

25:41-45 Jesus will banish the goats and send them into eternal fire (cf. 13:24-30, 31-43, 47-50; Rev. 14:11; 19:15). Jesus' descriptions of hell were familiar to the Jews of His day (cf. 3:12; 5:22; 18:8; Jude 7; Rev. 20:10-15). Only the righteous will enter the kingdom (v. 34). The fact that the goats will address Jesus as "Lord" (v. 44) does not show they are believers since everyone will acknowledge Him as Lord then (cf. Phil. 2:11).

The sheep and the goats will not express surprise because they anticipated a different fate. They will express surprise because of the evidence by which Jesus will judge their condition, namely their treatment of His brethren. Normally a person's works demonstrate his faith or lack of it.

"The King's messengers, immediately before He appears in glory, will go forth preaching the gospel of the kingdom everywhere; and when the King takes His throne, those that received the gospel of the kingdom among the nations are recognized as 'sheep,' and the despisers perish as 'goats.'"

25:46 The goats (unbelievers) will go into eternal punishment in hell eventually instead of entering the messianic kingdom (cf. 7:21-23; 13:40-43). Immediately they will enter Hades, the place of departed spirits, until God resurrects them at the end of the millennium and sends them to hell (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). The sheep (believers) will enter the kingdom that will be the first stage of their ceaseless life with God. Whereas eternal life begins when a person trusts Jesus Christ, the first stage of life in the King's presence for these believers will be the messianic kingdom. Elsewhere God revealed that there are degrees of happiness and responsibility in the kingdom (vv. 14-30; cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15) and degrees of punishment in hell (11:22; Luke 12:47-48).

(Adapted from URL: <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/matthew.pdf>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The unseen reality is that Jesus Christ, although invisible to us, is not absent from our world. He rules from on high, and he is present among us wherever people have great need. The ones who serve those who are thought to be "the least" in the eyes of the world serve the Lord who rules over all. Jesus told the story of today's lesson to help his followers adjust their vision. Seeing only what lies on the surface, they would see nothing exceptional about the needs of people around them. After all, the world has always been filled with needy people. There is nothing unusual in that! But with the adjustment that this story brings, one can see something else: we still see a world filled with need, but we also remember our Lord who deliberately shared those needs. We remember the Lord who used his divine authority not to serve himself but to meet the needs of others. We remember the Lord who gave his body and shed his blood for needy people like us. And so we can see that in the needy around us, whether their needs are big or small, the Lord himself is present. What needs will you meet today?

Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Many years ago a character in a comic strip said, "I love mankind. It's people I can't stand." That was humorous and cynical, but it was thought-provoking too. There are days when many of us feel that way. Conversely, when some people talk about all the people of the world of every color and nation they get a warm, fuzzy feeling. A soft drink had an advertising campaign many years ago that highlighted this idea of the world singing together in perfect harmony. How wonderful it is to imagine everyone living in peace and harmony! When it comes to actually interacting with someone who is different culturally, though, many of us are hesitant at best. We may even be afraid of or hostile to the idea. People who are different from us in skin color or culture may be hard for us to understand, and we do not take the time or make the effort to get to know them. When Jesus was here on earth, He went about doing good to people. He had time for people, even when He was tired. Jesus loved people and had compassion for them. This lesson tells us about something Jesus taught His disciples just days before His suffering and death.

Reward for loving action (Matt. 25:31-36)

Jesus described a time in the future when He will sit on His throne and reign as King and Judge. He will be like a shepherd, dividing those who follow Him from those who refuse Him. The “sheep” will be placed on the right, the place of power and honor, while the “goats” will be relegated to the left, the place of dishonor. Jesus will call those on His right “blessed of my Father” (vs. 34). He will invite them to enter His kingdom because of the love and compassion they have shown toward Him.

Loving action explained (Matt. 25:37-40)

Jesus explained that those He invited to enter His kingdom had demonstrated love and compassion for Him by aiding His needy and hurting brethren. Their loving actions in meeting basic human needs were proof of their faith in Christ. When we serve the needy, we actually serve Jesus too. We show that we are true children of the Father. Our reward will be blessing from God the Father and inheritance of the kingdom He has prepared for us.

Punishment for unloving action (Matt. 25:41-46)

Those who fail to live as children of the King will be banished from His presence. They will be cursed and driven from Him. There will be no place in His kingdom for them. Those who are concerned only about themselves live as the devil does. They shut their eyes to the human misery around them. Because they have not put their trust in Christ and received God’s gracious salvation themselves, they do not show loving-kindness to others. Jesus knows our hearts. He sees our motives and knows why we do good for others. Jesus is interested in a righteousness of the heart. Christians need to be spiritually aware and alert for opportunities to show God’s love in physical, tangible ways. With all the needy people around us, we need God’s guidance in knowing whom we can help and how. Good works do not save us. Our salvation comes from God’s grace when we accept His gift of Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour. However, salvation should lead to good works. Just as Jesus went about doing good, so should we.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Christ will judge everyone who has lived on the earth (Matt. 25:31 -33)
2. Faithful followers of Christ will be rewarded in His kingdom (vs. 34)
3. Our actions toward sick and needy believers are our actions toward God (vss. 35-40)
4. Christ will punish all who have not trusted in Him (vs. 41)
5. When we fail to love others, especially our Christian brothers in need, we are failing to love Jesus (vss. 42-45)
6. The results of Christ's judgment are eternal (vs. 46)