

Ministering Mightily

Really, Kenan?" Darrel asked. "You're going to drive out to the state prison today? On these roads?"

"Yeah," Kenan answered, dragging the last piece of his pancake through the remains of syrup on his plate. Kenan was finishing up breakfast with his friends after they had all enjoyed a morning workout at their neighborhood fitness club. He was looking forward to going to the prison, where he and two other men from his church held a men's Bible study. "They are expecting me. It's the third Saturday of the month."

"They just want to get out of their cells," Tyrell offered, who had just returned from paying the bill. "Besides, they're just playing jailhouse religion."

Kenan and his co-leaders took turns leading lessons. It was Kenan's turn, and he had the group studying the characteristics of a godly man. Today, the Scripture references were Proverbs 10:9 and Titus 2:7–8 and his example was the apostle Paul.

"There are probably some men there who are not that interested in the Bible study," Kenan said. "But I believe there are some who really want to hear the Word."

"How long have you been doing this?" Darrel asked. "Isn't there something better or more useful you would rather be doing with your time?"

"I enjoy going to the prison," Kenan said. "Really. And most importantly, I'm doing it in service to Christ. I leave the outcomes and usefulness to Him."

1. *Why do you think Jesus noticed the poor and the needy during His ministry?*
2. *What could it mean to see others through Jesus' eyes?*
3. *What does it mean to serve like Jesus?*

The Day of Judgment

Matthew 25:31–33 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.

Matthew 25:31–33 NIV

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

³² 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. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Jesus gives a description of the final judgement. This echoes the teaching of other Jewish rabbis: God shall judge the deeds of all people and repay according to what they have done (compare Rom. 2:6–11). There will be two groups of people at the day of judgment: those who have been reconciled to God through saving faith in Jesus, and those who reject God and are dismissed from His presence for all eternity. And the “Son of Man” shall judge (v. 31). This is language from Daniel 7:13–14. Daniel saw God’s chosen representative and king who shall receive all honor and dominion. Jesus is this king—the one whom God uses to unveil His indisputable, final authority. Jesus shall sit on the throne and be surrounded by a myriad of servants who could strike terror in the hearts of mortals like us (v. 31). No one will miss this final sorting.

Jesus compares Himself, the judge and king, to a shepherd who separates sheep and goats. The lambs represent those who receive a favorable judgment, while the goats receive an unfavorable judgment. To be exalted to the “right hand” of the king was considered an exceptional honor and indicative of authority.

4. *Who will appear before Jesus in the final judgment?*

5. *How will Jesus separate the people in front of him?*

The Sheep on the Right

Matthew 25:34–40 KJV

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.

Matthew 25:34–40 NIV

³⁴ "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.' ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ 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.'

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

To those on His right, those who have received favorable judgment, the king gives blessing and reward. They receive an “inheritance” (v. 34) as children of God with positions of responsibility and authority in God’s kingdom. Jesus gives the reasoning behind this, and it seems to take the “sheep” by surprise. The king says that they were kind to Him when He was hungry, thirsty, and a stranger (v. 35). He focuses on their actions and doesn’t mention what they believe. As the letter of James says, “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:17). Genuine faith is dynamic and must, by definition, express itself in God-honoring ways.

Jesus reveals a profound truth about His relationship to humanity: to show acts of kindness to another is to do the same for Jesus. He experiences emotional and physical pain right along with people who are in need.

6. *How does the judge reward the “sheep”?*

7. *How is serving others like serving Jesus?*

The Goats on the Left

Matthew 25:41–46 KJV

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 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,

Matthew 25:41–46 NIV

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you

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.

hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

To those on his left, those who have received an unfavorable judgment, the king speaks words of rebuke and condemnation. They are removed from God’s presence like the enemies of God. As in the case of the “sheep,” the judge’s sentence seems to catch the condemned by surprise. “When?” they ask, did they ever turn their backs on the needs of the Lord before them, the one now sitting in judgment. They don’t recall seeing Him hungry, thirsty, unclothed, a stranger, or in prison (v. 44). The king says, “Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (v. 45). Their failure to reach out toward those in need was a failure to serve Jesus.

At this judgment, God in His perfect fairness gives to each person according to what they have displayed from the heart: either a desire to place God’s grace and compassion at the center, or a desire for a selfish existence apart from God. According to Jesus’ words, everyone can display their reception of Him through acts of compassion and mercy. It simply cannot be true that we know Jesus, while at the same time turning our backs on the needs of His people—those with whom He identifies. What our hearts lead us to do reveals our choice between eternal life or a curse.

8. *Why does the judge rebuke the “goats”?*

9. *How are our actions connected to our experience of grace?*

Moved with Compassion

“Compassion” is a buzzword today, but what does it mean? Some synonyms are sympathy, empathy, understanding, and care. Sometimes I ask myself, “What if I don’t feel those things?” It’s easy to be wrapped up in my own story and my needs. But we can examine the story of Jesus to find Him moved with compassion, and perhaps that can help.

It seems like Jesus was constantly meeting people with physical needs. In Matthew 14:14, Jesus felt compassion for a crowd of people who were looking for a leader, “sheep without a shepherd” Mark calls them (6:34). Like a good shepherd, Jesus fed the people and took care of their physical needs; He didn’t turn away. Then on a second occasion in Matthew 15:32, Jesus was once more confronted by people who were hungry. He says to His disciples, “I do not want to send them away hungry.” Jesus could have let people fend for themselves, but He treated their physical needs as His responsibility. He gave them food and care, satisfying them just like God had done for Israel in the wilderness.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:34–46 don’t require us to make a dramatic show of anything, only that we address the real needs of those around us. If we are detached, it may require that we start to look with new eyes. Perhaps we might enter into a new context to meet people who are poor and in desperate need. If that weren’t enough, we read that Jesus is going to be there, present in the midst of the people we serve. The sheep were surprised by this revelation. I imagine the strangers they helped and the people they fed didn’t seem glorious or kingly. It scares me to imagine that I might blink and miss the opportunity to shake Jesus’ hand, to greet Him at the door, and welcome Him as a brother.

10. *How do you define compassion?*

11. *Do you recall a time when, like Jesus, you were moved with compassion? When?*

12. *How has Jesus been present in your midst?*

On His Right Hand

Jesus wants us to know that when we look at the faces of hungry children and give them a meal, we are doing this for Him. This is also true when we give a drink to the thirsty, and clothing to those without clothes. It carries on when we visit those in prison and the sick in the hospital. Jesus wants us to know that, although He is king and Lord, He is connected to everyone—the small and great.

► *There are many charity organizations and non-profits that assist those in need. Choose a friend, and ask whether he or she has found a way to serve others. We can expect to be judged according to whether we respond to the needs we see.*

KEY VERSES

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: 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. —Matthew 25:34–35 KJV

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.”

—Matthew 25:34–35 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of February 17 through February 23

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** 2 Timothy 3:10–17—Equipped for Every Good Work.
- Tue.** Psalm 119:17–24—Delight in God's Ways.
- Wed.** Matthew 25:1–13—The Bridegroom Is Coming.
- Thu.** Matthew 25:14–30—Praise for a Faithful Servant.
- Fri.** Psalm 119:41–48—Choose the Way of Faithfulness.
- Sat.** Isaiah 58—The Fast That God Chooses.
- Sun.** Matthew 25:31–46—Compassion for the Least.