

Focus on Matthew 25:31–46

WHAT is important to know? — *From “Exegetical Perspective,” Thomas D. Stegman, SJ*
Matthew’s description of the last judgment ends with the notice that “the righteous” will be called to inherit eternal life (v. 46). These are the merciful who are blessed (Matt. 5:7), the people whose hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt. 5:6) leads them to respond with compassion to the hunger and thirst of others. Jesus teaches that God’s reign—the full revelation of which we await—is characterized in the present, not by powerful works and miracles, but by deeds of love, mercy, and compassion, especially toward those most in need. Jesus’ kingly ministry is to be reflected in his followers’ exercise of shepherding care.

WHERE is God in these words? — *From “Theological Perspective,” Mark Douglas*
This text needs other texts in Matthew and throughout Scripture that, while not necessarily untying its knots, at least place them in larger contexts. Other texts and further theological exploration might remind us that Christians are always both recipients of the gospel and witnesses to it. Each of us is both unbeliever and believer, both commanded to care and in need of care, both judged by the Son of Man and identified with him in our weakness, both under judgment for our failures to pursue justice and saved by grace, both a goat and a sheep.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives? — *From “Pastoral Perspective,” John M. Buchanan*
What I can do and am called to do is to remember what Jesus said: “When you did it to one of the least of these, my family, you did it to me”—not, please notice, just the certifiably hungry and truly deserving. The only criterion he set was “least of these,” which means those who are weak and vulnerable, the little ones, particularly the small ones, the children. So what you and I can do and are called to do is not to ignore and overlook, but to look into a human face and to see there the face of Jesus Christ, because that is what he said.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do? — *From “Homiletical Perspective,”
Lindsay P. Armstrong*

This Scripture testifies that salvation is something we discover, often when we least expect it. In Matthew 25:37–39, the righteous are surprised to realize they had cared for the King of creation; evidently, they simply shared who they were and what they had freely, without calculation or expectation. In verse 44, the unrighteous are shocked that they missed opportunities to show love to the King; had they known God was in their midst, they would have done the right thing. Yet, the King is looking for a natural overflowing of love, not calculated efforts designed to project a certain image. This is the kind of love Jesus has come to demonstrate and share.

Meeting Christ in Human Need

The parable sets the language of Christ's surprising presence in past tense: "I was hungry, . . . I was . . ." For us to take the parable to heart, however, the shift must be made to present tense. Christ *is* among us, in the person of those who hunger, who thirst . . . So the missional question is: How will we respond to the ones in whom we encounter Christ today? In the spaces below, reflect on how you will respond to the Christ you encounter in human need.



I Am Hungry How Will You Give Me Food?

I Am Thirsty How Will You Quench My Thirst?

I Am a Stranger How Will You Welcome Me?

I Am Naked How Will You Clothe Me?

I Am Sick How Will You Care for Me?

I Am in Prison How Will You Visit Me?
