

Command #22: Help the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters.

Matthew 25:31-46 // Jerry Barber

Condensed Version

Read Matthew 25:31-46 and discuss these questions with your disciple(s):

1. What are the main lessons Jesus is teaching in this passage?
2. What makes it challenging for you to serve other disciples and servants of Jesus?
3. Can you identify at least one practical way you can serve "the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters" this month?

Study: (answers follow below)

1. Read Matthew 25:31-46 and make a few observations about the passage.
2. Read Matthew 12:46-49 and 28:8-10 to help learn whom Jesus is talking about serving when he mentions the "least of my brothers and sisters."
3. Salvation is by faith alone, not by works, but it is easy to misunderstand this passage to be teaching the opposite. What are some indications in the passage that show that Jesus is not trying to teach people to try to "earn their way into heaven"?
4. Can you think of additional passages in the New Testament that teach that salvation comes through faith and that good works accompany saving faith but don't replace it?
5. What are the main lessons Jesus is teaching in this passage?

Answers:

1. Answers will vary.
2. Jesus is speaking about his disciples as “the least.”
3. Why this passage does not teach that one can earn salvation by good works:
 - a. First, the righteous and the wicked are surprised when Jesus tells them they did (or did not) serve HIM when they served “the least.” They did not say, “Yes, we knew we were really helping you.” The sheep and the goats did not act the way they did in order to gain God’s approval, but because that reflected who they were.
 - b. This is like a test for authenticity: if the goats thought they would gain God’s approval by treating “the least” differently, they might have done it hypocritically; this is important because Jesus wants us to do good works FROM THE HEART.
 - c. The sheep are in a relationship with God, as they are called “blessed by my Father” and have an inheritance in the kingdom of God.
 - d. Finally, other teaching in Matthew proves the role of Jesus Christ in salvation, such as 1:21; 11:27-30 and 20:28.
4. In addition to this passage, there are many places in the New Testament that stress salvation comes by faith and works are the accompanying result, such as Ephesians 2:8-10.
5. Main lessons: (1) There are ONLY two options for ways a person can respond to Jesus: follow him and love his people or not. (2) How you treat Jesus’ “little brothers and sisters” is how you treat Him (40, 45). (3) Final reward and punishment are real and should not be taken lightly (46).

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Worship:

Read Philippians 2:5-11 and identify how Jesus served God's people. What do you admire about Jesus, considering the way he came to this earth? You might want to try writing out a prayer of worship to him, based on what you learn from this passage.

Obey:

Consider what you need to know and do in order to put this command into practice. Answer the following questions that may help you apply the command:

1. What makes it challenging for you to serve other disciples and servants of Jesus?
2. Can you identify at least one practical way you can serve "the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters" this month?

Train:

Perhaps the best ways to train others to meet the needs of believers are to:

- (1) Keep lifting up Christ before them as the perfect example of One who did this.
- (2) Let them watch you meet the needs of God's people.
- (3) Serve others together (and then explain *why* you are doing it).