Week 2
Text: Matthew 25:31–46
Topic(s): Service, Outreach, Compassion

Big Idea of the Message: The church should be a group of people who not only offer spiritual help but also offer practical, physical provision to those who are suffering.

Application Point: We must serve those around us who are in need as an extension of the grace we have received from God.

Introduction: [Note to the Pastor: To begin your service, perform this simple water feat using a few common items: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ab5nmQc8CHY.] Jesus said even giving a cup of cold water to someone in need brings his kingdom into the world. Even a small act of service, an act of compassion for someone in need, ushers them into God’s presence because, through it, they are experiencing his love, tangibly expressed through God’s people. The church should be a group of people who not only offer spiritual help but also offer practical, physical provision to those who are suffering.

Point #1: Salvation Has Servant-Hearted Fruit (vv. 31–36)

Explanation: Jesus is warning his listeners about the day of judgment at the end of this age. Every person from every nation will be gathered before him as he sits on his throne (vv. 31–32). He will separate the people according his knowledge of who they are, “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (vv. 32–33). He will welcome his sheep to take their “inheritance, the kingdom prepared for [them] since the creation of the world” (v. 34) The distinguishing factor between the two groups will be their acts of service toward others as if to Jesus, particularly acts of generous benevolence (v. 36).

Illustration: “My gunnery Sergeant and I were inspecting a Marine training exercise when we spotted a second lieutenant ambling about. ‘Where is your foxhole, Lieutenant?’ I asked. He snapped off a salute and responded, ‘I don’t know, sir!’ Turning to the sergeant, he asked, ‘Gunnery, where is my foxhole?’ ‘You’re standing in it, sir,’ said the sergeant. ‘All you have to do is remove the dirt’” (Retired Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Como, “How to Find a Foxhole,” Readers Digest, July/August 2015, 157). Many times, people wonder, “Where can I serve?” The honest answer is we can serve right where we are! Get to work. Dig in and see how God can use you in your home, your church, and your community. Look for how to serve others right where God has placed you at the moment.

Application: We know from the whole message of the gospel that salvation is not based on works but on grace and comes to us through faith. Yet Jesus is warning his listeners that there will be a marked separation before his judgment seat, and not everyone who thinks they know him will turn to actually be his follower. Salvation is a gift from God, but its evidence is in the fruit of our lives. If we are truly born again, we will be living lives that prove it, and the proof is not in the consistency of our church attendance or how many Bible verses we know by heart. The proof of our belonging to
Jesus is our love in action for the people around us, especially the people who can’t give us anything in return.

**Point #2: When We Serve Others, We Are Serving Jesus (vv. 37–40)**

**Explanation:** In his story about the judgment day, Jesus foretells that those who are righteous will be surprised when he says they have done all these things for him, asking when they did so (vv. 37–39). Then he explains that whatever is done “for one of the least of these” is actually done for him (v. 40).

**Illustration:** Audio Adrenaline’s song “Kings & Queens” is based on the concepts in this same passage of Scripture: [https://youtu.be/gpUhZaBKlQ0](https://youtu.be/gpUhZaBKlQ0). If possible, it might be beneficial to have your band sing this song.

**Application:** When we serve people who can’t give us anything in return, we are serving Jesus himself. It doesn’t take a lot of money or a lot of special talent to do any of these small acts of service. All it takes is noticing someone and being willing to give them what they need in the moment. God applauds these small labors of love because he knows what a huge impact they can have in the heart of the recipient.

**Point #3: Compassionate Service Reaches the Lost (vv. 41–46)**

**Explanation:** Likewise, those who are separated from the Lord in the last day will be surprised at how Jesus will say they did not in fact serve him. They will be condemned for the lack of fruit in their lives, the evidence of a lack of servant-hearted compassion (vv. 41–45). Their punishment will be eternal separation from God in hell (vv. 41, 46).

**Illustration:** One wonderful example of Christian love in action is Homeboy Industries, a ministry to ex-gang members in the Los Angeles area. This organization, founded by a Jesuit priest, Father Greg Boyle, provides many services to help gang members leave gang life and have a viable, healthy future with meaningful employment. In the film about Father Boyle, G-Dog, it is stated that other programs aimed at getting gang members to leave gangs have a 30% success rate, but Homeboy Industries has a 70% success rate. Many former gang members go on to provide leadership in the organization. You can find stories of people whose lives were transformed through Homeboy Industries here: [http://www.homeboyindustries.org/transformation-stories/](http://www.homeboyindustries.org/transformation-stories/). Father Boyle emphasizes the importance of coming alongside the poor and suffering, rather than standing above them in judgment. This video tells the story of this organization: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7L77UaH5xSU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7L77UaH5xSU).

**Application:** Just as our right relationship with God is a spiritual truth with physical evidence played out in our daily lives, so also the kingdom of God is both spiritual and physical. People are going to have a hard time listening to any preaching if their stomachs are growling and their kids are crying from hunger (hence, the instructions
Jesus gave to his disciples to feed the five thousand who were getting hungry). We must be willing to meet both kinds of needs—because that’s what Jesus did. Everything we needed, he provided. It’s out of that understanding and gratitude that we must serve those in need around us as an extension of the grace we have received from God.

**Conclusion:** “The greatest satisfaction is to watch others grow with compassion. I see volunteers transformed, and it makes me know we can get back to a community of caring I grew up with” (Charlotte Tidwell, “Extraordinary America: 13 Unsung Heroes Who Will Restore Your Faith in Our Country,” *Readers Digest*, July/August 2015, 77). [See her story here: http://www.rd.com/true-stories/inspiring/extraordinary-america/]. We often wonder how we can change our world, how we can become the community that we used to know. This comes by helping others grow in Jesus-centered compassion. Imagine if all of us lived lives of compassion: What would that do for our city? How would the name of Jesus be glorified? *[Note to the Pastor: This week, consider explaining why you believe your new ministry expansion or ongoing work in the community will help the local church better serve those in your community. Also, this might be a good time to begin a new community outreach program or event. Give your people an opportunity to serve those in your city or town.]*