

THE KING WILL REPLY

This study looks at the same Bible passage as the sermon outline (pp.20-21 of Barnabas Aid magazine September/October 2019). It can be used before or after hearing the sermon. If it is used without the sermon, it may be useful for the group leader to read through the sermon outline beforehand. You may also like to read the SCAAW 2019 eight-day devotional booklet, which is enclosed with this magazine and can be ordered from barnabasfund.org/scaaw or contact your nearest Barnabas Fund office (details inside front cover of Barnabas Aid magazine September/October 2019).

The section headed "Digging Deeper" is for those who would like to explore the theme in more depth.



READ MATTHEW 25:31-46.

1. What are the six actions, meeting six basic needs, that Jesus describes?
2. The six basic needs were examples of everyday needs in the society in which the first hearers of this parable lived, but which of these needs are common in your society? If some are not relevant for your context, think of alternative examples that are. There may be plentiful safe, clean drinking water in your country but a lack of loving care for the elderly. So you could change the second action to: *I was frail and isolated, trapped in my flat, never meeting anyone from one week to the next, and you took me out for a drive, a coffee and a chat.*
3. It has been said: "There never was a parable which so opened the way to glory to the simplest people." Why does the parable of the sheep and the goats "open the way to glory" for ordinary Christians? How does this make you feel?
4. In verse 40 the King explains the basis for the way in which He has separated the sheep from the goats. What are the two features He identifies in those who have received help from the sheep?
5. What does Jesus mean by "least" (v. 40 KJV, NIV, NRSV, ESV)? If members of the group are using different translations of the Bible, it may be illuminating to compare how this verse is translated in various versions. Or go to www.bit.ly/Mat25-40 to see 59 English translations of the verse.
6. What does He mean by "my brethren" (v. 40 KJV)? See Matthew 12:46-50. How would you answer someone who claimed that this parable is teaching that God will judge us according to our reaction to general human need?
7. What are the two aspects of the reward for those who cared for their fellow Christians? (v. 34,46)
8. What are the two aspects of the punishment for those who did not? (v. 41,46)
9. We know from other parts of the Bible that we do not enter heaven because of our good deeds (Ephesians 2:8-9) and that eternal life is a free gift which we do not earn (Romans 6:23). In the light of this truth, how do you understand a parable which seems on the surface to be saying that we gain eternal life as a reward for helping other Christians? (Hint: think about expression or evidence, and read 1 John 3:14. Or read the last two paragraphs of the sermon outline on page 21 of Barnabas Aid magazine September/October 2019.)
10. Can you think of other Bible passages which encourage us to care for others as if we were caring for the Lord Himself or for His heavenly messengers? Here are some ideas: Genesis 18; Colossians 3:23; Hebrews 13:2.
11. About the year 200 AD, a Christian leader described the giving of the Church in Carthage (modern Tunisia):

"On the monthly collection day, everyone who wants to puts in a small donation, but only if he wants to, and only if he is able. There is no compulsion; it is all voluntary. These gifts [are used] to support and bury poor people, to supply the needs of boys and girls who are destitute and orphans, and of old people who are confined now to the house; shipwrecked people, too; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing else than their faithfulness to the cause of God's Church, they are looked after by their fellow believers."¹

How does this compare with the way giving is organised at your own local church and the purposes for which the money is used?

12. As planet earth is now a “global village”, we can be aware of the needs of other believers far away and even do something to help them, which was not possible for the followers of Jesus many centuries ago. How should we use this opportunity?
13. Decide on one practical thing you will do to help an “unimportant” Christian in need. If you like, share your decision with the rest of the group, so they can pray for you and the person you are going to help. Could the group do something together to provide practical help – perhaps some gardening or DIY for a church member who is sick or disabled?

DIGGING DEEPER

14. Read through Matthew 24 and Matthew 25:1-30. How does our passage fit into the general theme?
15. In the Gospels, Jesus says more about hell than about heaven. He also says more about hell than any other Biblical character does. What should we learn from this?
16. Jesus’ emphasis in this parable is on helping His brothers and sisters. The Greek word for “brothers” is *adelphoi*, literally meaning “of the same womb”. Do you feel as close to fellow Christians as if you had come from the same womb? Do you feel that you are part of a separate Christian “race” – as Christians were seen by themselves and by others around the year 200 AD? If you do not feel this close to your fellow believers, why not? And, how can you change the situation?

Endnotes

¹ Tertullian, *Apology on Behalf of Christians*, chapter 39.