

Bible Passage

Matthew 25:35-40

³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Outline

1. Faith Judged By Action
 - a. Biblical Basis
 - i. Examination of Matthew's teachings on the final judgment.
 - ii. The separation of sheep and goats as a metaphor for humanity's judgment.
 - b. Nature of Salvation
 - i. Salvation through faith in Jesus' sacrifice, not by personal works.
 - ii. Theological understanding of faith and works in Christian doctrine.
 - c. Practical Implications
 - i. How faith should be evident in one's actions.
 - ii. Real-life examples and anecdotes illustrating faith in action.
2. Showing Faith Through Acts of Mercy
 - a. Good Works as Faith Manifestation
 - i. Scriptural examples and teachings on acts of mercy.
 - ii. The role of good works in demonstrating faith.
 - b. Redefining the Great Commandment
 - i. Analysis of 'loving God and loving others' in a practical context.
 - ii. How acts of mercy align with loving God.
 - c. Community Engagement and Ministry

- i. The importance of not retreating into personal faith.
 - ii. Strategies for engaging in acts of mercy within and outside the church community.
 - iii. Addressing challenges and overcoming barriers in active ministry.
3. Recognizing Christ in All We Serve
- a. Challenging Traditional Church Views
 - i. Critique of prioritizing certain types of individuals in discipleship.
 - ii. Encouraging a broader, more inclusive approach to ministry.
 - b. Jesus in the Margins
 - i. Identifying Christ in the marginalized and neglected.
 - ii. Stories and examples of finding Jesus in unexpected places.
 - c. Inclusive Service
 - i. Strategies for serving all individuals, regardless of their social or economic status.
 - ii. Encouraging a culture of inclusivity in Christian service.
 - d. Serving Christ through Kindness
 - i. Theological basis for seeing Christ in every act of mercy.
 - ii. Personal reflections and exhortations to recognize Christ in daily interactions.

Notes

The essence of love is redefined as an outward action rather than a self-centered emotion. Contrary to popular belief, love in this context is about commitments and serving others, including God, and not about seeking personal satisfaction.

The teachings of Jesus, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew, focus on the concept of judgment and the end times. Here, Jesus' direct teachings about the final judgment describes a future where the Son of Man separates people as a shepherd divides sheep from goats, symbolizing the final judgment of humanity. This separation raises questions about the nature of salvation – whether it's predestined or a matter of choice. Salvation is not through personal works but through faith in the works of Jesus, specifically his sacrifice. However, faith is not passive; it should manifest in actions. This connection between faith and works is crucial – faith should lead to good works, although these works in themselves do not grant salvation. Instead, salvation comes through faith in Jesus' works. Faith is essential for salvation, but it must be a faith that is active and demonstrated through deeds.

A significant challenge arises when one's relationship with Christ doesn't translate into action. The importance of faith in this context is not just about belief but is also about its manifestation through good works. Acts of kindness—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned—are not just charitable actions but are indeed

acts of serving Christ Himself. This concept redefines the great commandment of loving God and others, showing that loving others is inherently loving God.

Faith should not be an isolated, introspective experience. While personal moments with God are essential and valued, Christianity calls for engagement with the world and practical expressions of faith. It's not enough to retreat into personal study or worship; one must also participate in the community and perform acts of mercy. Many face the struggle of balancing personal faith with active ministry, especially when feeling hurt or burned out by church experiences. It's acknowledged that withdrawal for personal restoration is vital, but it should lead back to community engagement and service, following Jesus' example.

Worship is not about receiving from God but about giving glory to God. Lifting hands in worship symbolizes offering oneself to God, not expecting to receive. This reorients the understanding of love and worship from being self-centered to God-centered, emphasizing that true Christian love and faith are about outward action and service, not just inward reflection.

Christianity teaches that love is not about what one receives, but about giving to others. This approach is grounded in the belief that serving others, especially those in need, is serving Christ himself. The emphasis is on actions of mercy being directed not just at those in need but as an act of devotion to Jesus.

This perspective challenges the traditional views within the church, particularly regarding discipleship and

ministry. Often, churches prioritize individuals who fit a certain image of a Christian, overlooking those who might not appear to be the 'ideal' disciple. This approach can lead to feelings of rejection and inadequacy among those who earnestly seek to serve and grow in faith. Moreover, the concept of service in Christianity goes beyond the superficial act of doing good works. It's about finding Jesus in the brokenness of the world and serving those who are marginalized and neglected. True service in the Christian faith is seen when one helps the 'least of these'—the sick, needy, and imprisoned—reflecting Jesus' teachings on compassion and mercy.

This idea extends to preaching and teaching within the church. Sermons and teachings should not just be about imparting wisdom or moral lessons, but about pointing to Jesus and His wisdom. The focus should be on worshiping God through the message, emphasizing His glory and standards rather than just human efforts or wisdom. The realization that one's faith and actions should be solely focused on Jesus is central to this perspective. It's a reminder that serving Christ means serving others, especially those who are marginalized or don't fit the typical image of a Christian. This approach redefines Christian service as an act of love and worship, deeply rooted in faith and commitment to following Jesus' example.

A core principle is that service to the marginalized and needy is service to Christ himself. This perspective challenges the conventional approach where faith is often viewed as what one can gain from it. The real test of faith

and service comes not in serving those who appear to be ideal Christians but in reaching out to those on the fringes of society. The Christian walk involves a profound realization that Jesus is found in the least expected places - among the weak, the hungry, the needy, and those imprisoned. This understanding calls for a shift in the mindset of the church and its members. It's not about filling seats in a church when Jesus is the guest speaker; it's about recognizing Christ in the everyday interactions with those who are often overlooked or marginalized.

A major challenge in many churches is the fear of engaging with people who do not fit the typical Christian mold or cultural expectations. There's a tendency to serve and disciple only those who seem to fit a certain Christian image, while missing the opportunity to see Christ in those who are different. The message here is clear: true Christian service means welcoming and serving everyone, regardless of their appearance, background, or lifestyle.

The essence of being a Christian is understanding that the work has been done through Christ, and faith in His work grants the freedom to love and care for all people. Mistakes in this journey are inevitable, but they are part of the learning and growth process. This approach is not about achieving perfection but about striving to see Jesus in everyone, even those who might seem unworthy or challenging to serve. The vision for the church is to fulfill the Great Commission not just by making disciples among those who are easy to reach but by extending the love and message of Christ to the marginalized. This vision includes

inviting and welcoming people from all walks of life into the church community, allowing them to experience the love of Christ through the congregation's actions.