

Deeper Applications: “Sooner or Later 4: Righteous Judgment”

Looking for Jesus Sermon Series #11

Matthew 25:31-46

Cross Community Church, Savannah, Ga.

September 27, 2026

- Looking for Jesus #1 “The Great Why” Matt. 24:1-6/Daniel
9:20-27 July 12, 2026
- Looking for Jesus #2 “Now and Not Yet” Matt. 24:1-14
July 19, 2026
- Looking for Jesus #3 “Peace Has an Enemy” Matt. 24:15-22
July 26, 2026
- Looking for Jesus #4 “Seen by Some; Seen by All” Matt. 24:23-28
August 2, 2026
- Looking for Jesus #5 “Signs of the Time” Matt. 24:29-31
August 9, 2026
- Looking for Jesus #6 “Signs of the Seasons” Matt. 24:32-35
August 16, 2026
- Looking for Jesus #7 “Live: Looking” Matt. 24:36-42
August 30, 2026
- Looking for Jesus #8 “Sooner or Later 1: Resolved Obedience” Matt. 24:42-51
September 6, 2026
- Looking for Jesus #9 “Sooner or Later 2: Revealing Wisdom” Matt. 25:1-13
September 13, 2026
- Looking for Jesus #10 “Sooner or Later 3: Rewarded Faithfulness” Matt. 25:14-30
September 20, 2026
- Looking for Jesus #11 “Sooner or Later 4: Righteous Judgment” Matt. 25:31-46
September 27, 2026
- **Main Idea: The Nations will one day be righteously judged based on love of the least of Jesus’s brothers**

Matthew 25:31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from

the foundation of the world. 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,^[a] you did it to me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Summary

What does it mean to truly see Jesus? That question sits at the heart of a powerful exploration of Matthew 25, where the righteous King separates the nations as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The central truth is both simple and staggering: every time we feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, or visit the imprisoned, we are doing it to Jesus himself. The least, the forgotten, the marginalized -- these are the faces of Christ in our daily lives. The sermon challenges us to move beyond merely believing in Jesus as Savior and to enthrone him as King, because a king on the throne of our hearts produces a life that overflows with love toward others. We are reminded that this is not a works-based salvation, but a salvation that works -- genuine faith in Christ will always be accompanied by observable acts of love. The haunting question echoing through this text is one we must carry with us into every ordinary moment: did we see him? Did we recognize Jesus in the crowd today?

Discussion Questions

The sermon describes a progression from atoning love to abiding love to abounding love to announcing love to arriving love — at which stage do you find yourself most often stalling, and what do you think holds you back from moving forward?

Jesus says that serving the least of these is equivalent to serving him directly — how does that truth change the way you view the mundane or inconvenient opportunities to help others that appear in your daily life?

The pastor noted that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels, not for humanity, and that anyone who ends up there goes as an intruder — how does that reality shape your sense of urgency in sharing the gospel with those around you?

The sermon draws a distinction between believing in the Son of Man and making Jesus king of your life — in what practical ways does genuine kingship of Christ look different from mere intellectual belief in who he is?

The pastor described nearly hanging up the phone on a woman whose house had just caught fire because he had already prayed for her — what does his experience reveal about the gap that can exist between religious habit and genuine Christlike compassion?

The righteous in the parable ask 'when did we see you?' seemingly unaware of the significance of their own acts of service — what does their unawareness suggest about the relationship between authentic faith and self-conscious religious performance?

Isaiah 6 is referenced as a moment when seeing God's holiness immediately revealed Isaiah's own sinfulness — how does a clearer vision of who God is change the way you understand the depth of your own need for grace?

The sermon describes sheep as animals that huddle together for warmth and community, while goats are individualistic and self-sufficient — in what ways do you see the tendency toward isolation rather than community showing up in your own spiritual life?

The pastor reflects that God designed the sermon series title 'Looking for Jesus' to point toward this final message about seeing Christ in the marginalized — how does actively looking for Jesus in the people around you transform the way you move through an ordinary week?

The judgment of the nations described in Matthew 25 is presented as a righteous evaluation of whether people recognized and served Christ in others — what specific habits or practices might help you become more attentive to those moments before they pass you by?

Small Group Guide

"Sooner or Later: The Righteous Judgment"

Based on Matthew 25:31-46

Overview

This week's sermon concluded the Olivet Discourse series by examining the judgment of the nations described in Matthew 25:31-46. Jesus presents a vivid picture of the returning King separating sheep from goats based on one central question: Did you see me in the least of these,

my brothers? This guide will help your group wrestle with that question together and consider what it means for daily life.

Key Takeaways

- Jesus will one day return as the righteous judge, and all nations will be gathered before his throne.
 - The sheep and goats are mixed together and look similar from a distance. The difference is revealed on the inside by how they have lived.
 - The central question of the judgment is not whether you believed in the Son of Man, but whether you made him King and demonstrated that through love for others.
 - Serving the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned is serving Jesus himself.
 - Hell was prepared for the devil and his angels, not for people. Those who go there go as intruders, having rejected the grace that was freely offered.
 - Salvation is by grace through faith alone, but salvation is never alone. It will always be accompanied by observable works of love.
 - Atoning love, when it becomes abiding love, overflows into abounding, announcing, and arriving love toward others.
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Opening Question

Take a few minutes to check in before diving into the text.

- When was the last time you helped someone in a moment of genuine need? What did that experience feel like?
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Discussion Questions

Looking for Jesus

1. The sermon centered on the question, "Did we see you, Lord?" In an honest moment, how often do you find yourself actually looking for Jesus in the people around you throughout a normal week? What tends to distract you from seeing him?
2. Pastor Kevin described a moment when he was about to hang up the phone and go back to sleep after a church member called about a house fire in the middle of the night. He said God pressed him to move from seeing and hearing the need to actually feeling and serving it. Can you think of a time when you saw a need but did not act on it? What held you back?

3. The sermon described sheep as animals that huddle together for warmth, while goats are individualistic and prefer to stay separate. How does this imagery challenge the way you approach community, both inside and outside the church?
4. Pastor Kevin said this: "We don't serve to be saved, but because we're saved we want to serve others." How does understanding salvation as the foundation of service rather than the result of service change the way you think about doing good works?
5. Matthew 25:41 tells us that the eternal fire was prepared for the devil and his angels, not for people. Pastor Kevin noted that anyone who ends up there goes as an intruder. How does that reality shape the urgency you feel about sharing the gospel with people in your life who do not yet know Jesus?
6. The sermon offered four interpretations of who "the least of these my brothers" refers to: fellow disciples, national Israel, needy people in general, or neighbors broadly. Which interpretation resonates most with you, and why? How does your answer shape the way you think about who you are responsible to serve?
7. Pastor Kevin described a progression: atoning love becomes abiding love, abiding love becomes abounding love, abounding love becomes announcing love, and announcing love becomes arriving love. Where do you find yourself in that progression right now? Where do you feel stuck?

Sheep and Goats

8. The sheep in Matthew 25 were surprised. They did not remember serving Jesus. They simply served people in need. What does their surprise reveal about the nature of genuine, Spirit-led love for others?
9. The goats were also surprised. They did not remember failing to serve Jesus. What does their surprise reveal about the danger of going through life without being intentional about looking for Jesus in others?
10. The sermon noted that sheep and goats graze together and look similar from a distance. How does this challenge any tendency you might have to assume you can tell who is a genuine follower of Jesus simply by outward appearances or church attendance?

Reflection and Personal Application

Take a few quiet minutes before discussing these as a group.

- Think about the address where you live, the workplace where you spend your week, or the school where you study. Who are the people in those places who might be hungry, thirsty, lonely, sick, or in some form of need? Write down one or two names or faces that come to mind.
 - What is one specific, concrete thing you could do for one of those people this week?
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Practical Applications

Choose one of the following to commit to before your group meets again.

1. **See someone this week.** Identify one person in your neighborhood, workplace, or daily routine who is easy to overlook. Make intentional eye contact, learn their name, and ask how they are doing. Report back to the group.
 2. **Serve a tangible need.** Find one person this week who has a practical, physical need, whether food, clothing, transportation, or company, and meet it without waiting to be asked twice.
 3. **Pray with your eyes open.** Each morning this week, before you leave your home, pray one simple prayer: "Lord, show me where you are today. Help me see you in the people I meet." Keep a short journal of what you notice.
 4. **Have a gospel conversation.** Think of someone in your life who does not know Jesus. This week, take one step toward them. It may be as simple as a text, a meal, or a question about their life. Ask God to open a door.
 5. **Examine your community life.** Sheep huddle. Goats wander. Evaluate honestly whether you are leaning into Christian community or pulling away from it. If you have been pulling away, reach out to one person in your group this week and re-engage.
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Closing Prayer Focus

Close your time together by praying through these specific requests.

- Pray for eyes to see Jesus in the people you encounter every day.
 - Pray for courage to act when you see a need rather than passing by.
 - Pray for the person in your life who does not yet know Jesus, by name.
 - Pray for your church as it seeks to be a witness in your city and as it participates in supporting new church plants in your region.
 - Pray for one another by name, asking God to move each person in the group from seeing to serving.
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Memorization Suggestion

Consider memorizing Matthew 25:40 this week. The verse teaches that whatever is done for the least of Jesus's brothers is done for Jesus himself. Let that truth stay with you throughout the week as you look for him in the people around you.

For Further Study

- Ezekiel 34:15-19 -- God's rebuke of shepherds who neglect the flock
- Isaiah 58:6-7 -- The kind of service God calls his people to
- James 2:14-17 -- Faith without works examined
- 1 John 3:16-18 -- Love demonstrated through action, not just words
- Romans 8:1-4 -- No condemnation for those who are in Christ

- [5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide](#)

- **Based on the Sermon Series: Looking for Jesus**

- [Day 1: The Holy God Who Renews the Weary](#)

- **Reading:** Isaiah 40:28-31
 - **Devotional:** The God who created the ends of the earth does not grow tired. He does not lose track of your situation. He does not run out of strength on your behalf. Yet we often live as though He does. We exhaust ourselves trying to carry what He never asked us to hold alone. The invitation of this passage is to wait on Him, not passively, but with expectant trust. Waiting on God is an act of faith. It declares that His strength is greater than your weakness. Where are you straining today under a burden He is ready to carry?
 - **Reflection Question:** In what area of your life are you relying on your own strength rather than waiting on God to renew you?
 - **Practical Application:** Identify one responsibility or worry you have been carrying in your own strength. Surrender it specifically in prayer today, and return to that surrender every time anxiety rises.
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- [Day 2: Jesus Paid a Debt Greater Than We Realized](#)

- **Reading:** Romans 5:6-11
 - **Devotional:** The sermon reminded us of two realities that must remain in constant tension in the believer's heart: we are greater debtors than we realized, and God is a greater forgiver than we understood. When Isaiah stood before the holiness of God, he did not say he was a decent man trying his best. He confessed he was undone. That honest reckoning with our sin is not meant to crush us. It is meant to drive us toward a Savior whose grace is deeper than our failure. The cross was not a small gesture. It was the full payment of an unpayable debt, offered freely to the undeserving.
 - **Reflection Question:** Have you allowed a comfortable familiarity with the gospel to diminish your sense of wonder at what it actually cost?
 - **Practical Application:** Spend time today meditating on one specific sin that Christ's sacrifice covered in your life. Let gratitude, not guilt, be the result. Allow that gratitude to shape how you treat someone around you before the day ends.
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- [Day 3: Seeking the Kingdom First](#)

- **Reading:** Matthew 6:25-34
 - **Devotional:** Jesus does not tell us that the concerns of daily life are trivial. He tells us they are not ultimate. Worry reveals where our trust actually lives. When we seek first the kingdom of God, we are not ignoring the practical realities of life. We are placing them in their proper order beneath the authority of a King who already knows what we need. The sermon pointed us toward a kingdom that has been prepared since the foundation of the world for those who belong to Christ. That kingdom is not a distant afterthought. It is the lens through which every ordinary day should be seen and every ordinary decision should be made.
 - **Reflection Question:** What anxieties are currently competing with your pursuit of God's kingdom for first place in your attention?
 - **Practical Application:** Before checking your phone or addressing the demands of your day tomorrow morning, spend the first ten minutes seeking God in prayer and Scripture. Practice placing the kingdom first in the most practical way available to you.
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- [Day 4: Did You See Jesus in the Least of These](#)

- **Reading:** Matthew 25:31-46
 - **Devotional:** Jesus makes a stunning claim in this passage. He is present in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, and the imprisoned. To serve them is to serve Him. To overlook them is to overlook Him. The sermon asked a pointed question: did we see Jesus? Not in a mystical or abstract sense, but in the face of the person whose need was placed directly in our path. Salvation is by grace through faith alone, but faith that saves will always produce a life that serves. The evidence of a kingdom heart is not a feeling. It is a direction, consistently turned outward toward others in the name of Christ.
 - **Reflection Question:** When did you last pass by a need that God placed in front of you without stopping? What kept you from responding?
 - **Practical Application:** Ask God this morning to make you alert to one specific person in need today. When that moment arrives, do not let it pass. Act on what you see, even if the action is small.
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- [Day 5: Atoning Love That Spills Into the World](#)

- **Reading:** 1 John 4:7-21
- **Devotional:** The sermon traced a progression worth carrying with you: atoning love becomes abiding love, abiding love becomes abounding love, abounding love becomes announcing love, and announcing love becomes arriving love. The love of God is not meant to rest quietly inside you. It is designed by its very nature to move outward. When we abide in Christ as the branch abides in the vine, His love becomes the fruit others taste through our presence. The world is not looking for arguments about Christianity. It is hungry for people in whom the love of Christ has visibly taken up residence. You are that person. Go and let it arrive.
- **Reflection Question:** Is the love of Christ in you abiding quietly, or is it actively arriving in the lives of the people around you?

- **Practical Application:** This week, identify one person in your neighborhood, workplace, or family who is isolated or forgotten. Make one deliberate, tangible gesture of love toward that person. Do it without announcement, without expectation of recognition, and as an act of worship to the King who sees what is done for the least of His brothers.