

Rev. Lex DeLong / General Adult

Deacons / Deacons / Matthew 25:34–40; John 13

Notes

03/22 Matt. 25:34-40; John 13, "The Reward of the Servant," Subtitle: Ministering Mercies through God's Ministers, Scripture: Phil. 2:3-11, The Big Idea: To serve the "least of these" is to serve Christ himself. Key Concept: This sermon wraps up the series by looking at the spiritual weight of the office. It shifts the focus from "doing chores" to "ministering mercy." It sets the stage for the Easter series by pointing to Jesus, the Ultimate Servant.

Title: The Reward of the Faithful Servant

Subtitle: Serving the King by Serving His Flock

Main Scripture: Matthew 25:34-40 (NASB)

Supporting Scriptures: John 6:39-40; Philippians 2:3-8; John 13:12-17

Main Idea: Servants who serve the least of these, serves Christ Himself

In the bitter winter of A.D. 337, according to the ancient records of the church, a young Roman cavalry officer named Martin was riding toward the city gates of Amiens, in modern-day France. Martin would actually go on to become one of the most well-known figures in early church history—the Bishop of Tours—but on this day, he was just a soldier.

The weather was so freezing that people were dying of the cold in the streets. As Martin approached the gates, he saw a beggar huddled in the snow, shivering and practically naked. Dozens of wealthy citizens and fellow soldiers had already hurried past the man, ignoring his pleas. But Martin stopped. He had no extra clothes or money to give, so he drew his heavy Roman broadsword, took off his own thick military cloak, and cut it cleanly in half. He wrapped one half around the freezing beggar and draped the remaining, ruined half over his own shoulders, ignoring the mocking laughter of the bystanders.

His biographer, Sulpicius Severus, records that, that very night, Martin had a dream. In his dream, he was transported to heaven. He saw Jesus Christ sitting on His throne, surrounded by angels. But the King of Glory was not wearing a royal robe; He was wrapped in the torn half of a Roman cavalry cloak. One of the angels asked, "Master, where did You get that battered cloak?"

And Jesus answered, "My servant Martin clothed Me."

That historic account vividly captures the staggering, breathtaking reality of our primary text today.

Over the past three weeks, we have been walking closely through the high calling, the rigorous character, and the hands-on ministry of the diaconate. We have seen that the church does not appoint deacons merely to manage buildings or balance budgets; the church appoints deacons to be the shock absorbers of the congregation—servants who step into the messy, exhausting, and often unseen needs of the body to preserve unity and show the love of Christ.

Today, we reach the crescendo of this series. We are moving from the work of the deacon to the reward of the deacon.

But to truly understand the reward of a servant, we cannot just look at a job description. We have to lift our eyes to the Ultimate Servant. Before Jesus Christ ever called a single man to serve His church, He stepped out of the glories of heaven, took on the form of a bond-servant, and wrapped Himself in human flesh. He did not come to be served, but to serve. That service took Him to the agonizing death of the cross, where He bore the wrath we deserved, before conquering the grave in a glorious resurrection.

Jesus is the absolute blueprint for all ministry. He suffered to secure our inheritance, and He rose to guarantee it. That brings us to the main idea for our time in the Word this morning:

Main Idea:

Servants who serve the least of these, serves Christ Himself

As we turn to and look at Matthew 25, we see the King separating the sheep from the goats. If we are not careful we can become overwhelmed looking at the staggering standard of care the King expects—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick. If you are serving in the trenches of ministry, you might be tempted to read this and almost feel like your eternal standing depends on your performance. You might wonder if you have visited enough shut-ins or served enough meals to earn a reward.

But notice carefully how the King begins.

He **does not** begin this judgment by looking at the ledger of our works.

Before the King ever evaluates what the righteous *did*, He establishes *who they are* and *what they already possess*.

Before we can grasp the exhausting, practical work of a servant, we must first anchor our souls by faith in the unshakeable security of the servant, Jesus Christ.

Look with me at Matt. 25:34 as we are reminded...

I. The One Who Makes Servants Blessed of the Father Also Guarantees their Eternal Inheritance (Matthew 25:34)

Matthew 25:34 *"34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"*

- Our eternal inheritance rests in God's hands rather than our own performance.
- Our eternal inheritance was God's plan from the beginning.

A. The King sovereignly invites His own into a kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world

- Note what Jesus says at the beginning of v. 34 here, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father."
- The security of our eschatological hope — our hope of that which is to come — rests entirely on the One who calls us "blessed."

John 6:39–40 NASB95

³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

- In John 6:39-40, Jesus promised that it is the Father's will that the Son loses none of all He has given Him, but raises them up on the last day.
- Our security is rooted in the sovereign will of God.
- Notice here in Matt. 25:34 the specific word the King uses next: "inherit" the kingdom. The Greek word here is κληρονομήσατε (klēronomēsate). The word used here for inheritance is never a wage paid for work completed.
- You cannot earn an inheritance by clocking in enough hours or accomplishing enough work. It is a right of possession **granted** strictly by virtue of relationship and sonship with God, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Those who have put their faith in the work of Jesus Christ — believers — are able to serve with absolute confidence, because they have been adopted as sons and daughters by God, and have been given the right and ability to live as a child of God. Your eternal inheritance is received by faith, but secured and guaranteed by Christ Himself.

- This means a faithful deacon serves not to earn an inheritance, but from the overflow of grateful joy, knowing that their inheritance is already prepared and protected by the King.

B. The guarantee of our inheritance was secured by the ultimate condescension and servanthood of the King Himself (Philippians 2:5-8)

Philippians 2:5–8 NASB95

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- How was that inheritance secured? It cost the Father's Son His life. Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus did not cling to His divine prerogatives but emptied Himself, taking the "form of a bond-servant" (Phil. 2:7, NASB).
- Because Christ secured our future by becoming a servant, the calling of a deacon is never a demotion to church administration. It is a profound elevation to the very likeness of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

II. Faithful Servants Meet Tangible Needs Out of a Transformed Nature Rather Than for Calculated Reward (Matthew 25:35-39)

Matthew 25:35–39 *"35 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 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, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'"*

- This speaks to motives themselves. This is so much more than simple virtue signalling that we see permeating our media and social media posts these days.
- This reminds us that it is not about doing something for the reward one might receive for having done it, including accolades from others.
- These actions spoken of here are not done to convince others of how good or

compassionate you are, nor are they done simply knowing and seeking the reward at the end.

A. True service flows organically from internal, Christ-like compassion rather than adherence to an external ethical checklist.

- This is the difference between ethics and morality. Ethics are done to measure up to the external expectations, morality are actions that simply flow from the heart-felt motivation of what is right.
- As we read further in v. 37, notice the reaction of the righteous. They are genuinely surprised by the King's commendation! They ask, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You...?" (Matt. 25:37, NASB).
- When the King says, "I was a stranger, and you invited Me in," the Greek word is συνηγάγετε (synēgagete). It literally means to gather a person into your own company or to receive them into your home.
 - True service is highly relational. It is not done at arm's length.
- These servants were not motivated by the pursuit of a reward or a rigid sense of moral duty. They simply saw the desperate physical needs of others and moved to meet them out of a transformed heart.
- Deacon ministry is the formal expression, and should be the best example of this reality in the local church: folding the vulnerable, the sick, and the shut-ins into the fellowship of their own lives, quietly, relationally, and without calculation.
- This is not something that is expected only of deacons in the church, for all believers in the church of Jesus Christ should be living out this heartbeat for others in their lives. However, this should be that which is already and especially able to be seen as characteristic of those the church chooses to recognize and call as a deacon.
- This should be the character of one called to be a deacon.

B. This transformed nature demands a posture of humility that considers the all-encompassing needs of the congregation as more important than one's own (Philippians 2:3-4)

- Is that not the very definition of how, throughout the years, we have defined the concept of love in the bible, "Being so consumed for the needs of another that you begin to forget yourself."

Philippians 2:3-4 NASB95

³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

- The Apostle Paul commands believers: "do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4, NASB).
- Interestingly, in the original Greek text, there is no specific noun for "interests." Paul simply uses the phrase "the things" (ta) and pairs it with a verb (skopeō) that means to intensely focus on or scrutinize the other person, much like looking through a telescope.
- This demands that a deacon does not limit their care to just one convenient category. They must intentionally gaze upon the entirety of another person's life—their physical, spiritual, and emotional burdens.
- Faithful deacons embody this. They refuse to calculate the cost to themselves. Instead, they take a telescopic focus on the holistic well-being of the church family.

C. The terrifying contrast of the unrighteous reveals that apathy toward the brethren is a profound spiritual failure (Matthew 25:41-45)

- We have focused on the commendation of the sheep, but we cannot ignore the terrifying condemnation of the goats in the following verses. The King does not condemn them for actively persecuting, beating, or robbing His brothers. He condemns them for what they didn't do.
- They are condemned for the sin of apathy, that is that simply do not care about what is right in their hearts, they don't put their trust in the good that God defines and offers. They walked right past the hungry, the sick, and the naked, and did absolutely nothing, because their heart has not been transformed.
- When we tie this back to the Greek word skopeō—looking intensely through a telescope at the needs of others—it acts as a severe wake-up call for the church. In the Kingdom of God, simply "minding your own business" and ignoring the desperate needs of the church family is never neutrality; it is the ultimate spiritual failure.
- This is the heart of Hebrews 10:25 "25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." This is not about simple attendance or spending time with, it is speaking of the inability to encourage one another simply because we are not there. It is being content with spiritual apathy and

how our unwarranted absence is a reflection of it.

- We cannot serve the King of glory if we are forsaking the needs of His people.

III. Faithful Servants Ultimately Serve the King by Serving His People in Need (Matthew 25:40)

Matthew 25:40 "40 "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'"

A. Christ so intimately identifies with His flock that ministry rendered to others is received directly by Him

- We arrive at the staggering climax of this small section of text. The King's declarative standard is profound: "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40, NASB).
- The King identifies with "the least" (ἐλαχίστων — elachistōn). This is a superlative word meaning the absolute lowest or most profoundly overlooked. Think about that:

The King of Glory intimately unites Himself with the most helpless members of the congregation.

- We must remember the literal, eschatological setting of this judgment (the order of end-time events): the end of the Tribulation. In a global system ruled by the Antichrist, where believers cannot buy or sell without the Mark of the Beast, feeding a starving saint is not just polite charity in that historical context. **It is an act of high treason against the world system.**
- Caring for the vulnerable in that day will be a life-or-death declaration of allegiance to the true King.
- This reality elevates the diaconate from safe, administrative duty to courageous spiritual warfare.
- When a deacon or any child of God serves the vulnerable today, they are making a radical declaration of allegiance to Jesus in a hostile world. They refuse to declare allegiance to the prevailing world system. Instead, they are acting out in their care, their own allegiance to the true King of heaven and earth, the Lord of creation.

- The ultimate reward of the deacon is the realization that when they bend down to serve the lowest and most overlooked, they are interacting directly with the King.
- To serve the least of these is to serve Christ Himself.

B. The King has actively demonstrated the exact model of practical, self-sacrificial care He expects from His servants (John 13:12-15)

- We are not left guessing what this type of serving looks like.
- In John 13, Jesus took a towel and a basin to wash the disciples' feet. He took on the lowest task of a household slave to meet a very tangible, physical need, even to the lowest among them, even to the betrayer Judas.
- He explicitly commanded them, "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you" (John 13:15, NASB).
- When deacons perform the messy, unglamorous, or unnoticed work of caring for the hurting, they are directly participating in the physical ministry modeled by Jesus.

C. The profound reward of the deacon spans from the present joy of obedience to the eternal inheritance of the kingdom (John 13:16-17; Matthew 25:34)

- Jesus concludes His object lesson of washing feet by stating, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (John 13:17, NASB). He guarantees a present, immediate joy in honoring the Master today.
- This present blessedness serves as a down payment. It is a daily reminder of the eternal blessedness waiting at the Judgment Seat, where the King will finally say, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you" (Matt. 25:34, NASB).
- Therefore, the faithful deacon experiences the full spectrum of reward: the daily, grateful joy of actively mirroring the Savior's love now, culminating in the eternal commendation of the Master later.

As we close our time in the Word this morning, we have to recognize that this text radically alters how we view the people sitting in the pews around us.

To our deacons, and to every believer in this room: let this reality absolutely transform your week.

Do not grow weary in doing good, Paul tells us in Gal. 6:9.

When you are called to step into the messy, exhausting margins of people's lives—when you are walking into the quiet of a hospital room, managing benevolence for a family in crisis, or simply sitting in the living room of a shut-in who feels forgotten by the world—remember who you are actually serving. You are not just fulfilling a church program or checking a moral box. You are ministering to the King of Kings.

Look through the telescope of Philippians 2. Focus intensely on the holistic needs of this congregation, which is God's church. Let the grateful joy of your guaranteed inheritance drive you to love the "least of these" with the very compassion of Christ.

As we prepare to leave this place today, we must recognize one final, humbling truth.

Our ability to serve the King is only possible because the King first served us.

We started our message today with the ancient story of Martin—a Roman soldier who cut his own military cloak in half to cover a freezing beggar, only to discover he had clothed the Lord. It is a beautiful picture of earthly service. But three hundred years earlier, Roman soldiers stripped the King of His cloak, so that the King could clothe us.

Standing outside the gates of Jerusalem, those soldiers did not offer their garments to cover a dying man. They stripped the King of Glory naked and callously gambled for His tunic while He bled.

To secure the eternal inheritance that Matthew 25 promises, the King of Glory had to become the vulnerable one. He had to become the Ultimate Servant.

Next Sunday, March 29th, as we gather to prepare our hearts for Resurrection Sunday, our gaze is going to shift entirely to that Ultimate Servant on the cross. We are going to examine the ultimate climax of servanthood: The Suffering Servant. We are going to look deeply at the agonizing reality of Good Friday and the physical, spiritual, and eternal price Jesus paid to take our place.

He took on the absolute lowest position of a slave. He hung there exposed, forsaken, and stripped of His earthly garments for one specific reason: so that you and I could be clothed in His eternal righteousness.

He thirsted so that we could drink from the water of life.

He was imprisoned in our sin by death, in that moment in eternity, so that we could be welcomed into the joy of the Master.

Because He suffered, our inheritance is secure.

Because He served, we are free to serve.

May we go out this week and serve His flock with the unshakeable confidence of those whose future is guaranteed by the blood of the Lamb.