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THE LOOKOUT

DECEMBER 2022

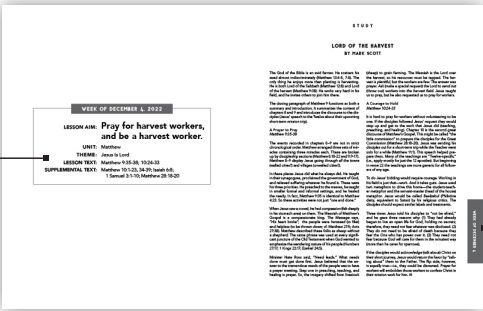
Unit: Matthew

Theme: Jesus Is Lord

Overview: Saying that “Jesus is Lord” can be difficult for someone living in a democratic republic. The paradigm of a democracy runs counter to living in a kingdom. Lordship implies that someone else is in charge. Perhaps the earliest Christian confession was “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Romans understood that to be a reference to a king. But Matthew’s audience used other titles to indicate the same; examples include “Christ” or “Son of God.” In this unit, students will learn from the disciples that Jesus is Lord of the harvest, they will learn from the miracles that Jesus is Lord of creation, they will learn from a parable that Jesus is Lord of judgment, and they will learn from the Magi that Jesus is Lord of all.

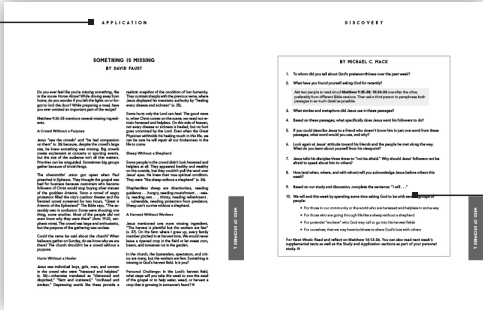
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF DECEMBER 18, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Live ready for the
Lord of Judgment.**

UNIT: Matthew

THEME: Jesus Is Lord

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 25:31-46

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 25:1-30; Revelation 20:1-15;
Psalm 96:9-13; John 5:22-23

LORD OF JUDGMENT

BY MARK SCOTT

Judging someone else might be the worst cultural sin in America right now. To pass judgment on someone is anathema. We do need to be careful with it (Matthew 7:1), but we must also judge with righteous judgment (John 7:24). Jesus came as a Savior the first time. When he returns, he will come as our judge. In fact, all judgment has been given to Jesus by the Father so that all will honor the Son (John 5:22-23). He is Lord of Judgment. The diamond of the gospel shines brightest on the black cloth of judgment.

Our lesson text is the last section (parable?) of the fifth discourse in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 24–25). It is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus delivered it on the Mount of Olives (the only mountain named in Matthew). Jesus had predicted the temple would be destroyed. The disciples figured that might be the end of the world, so they asked him when this would happen and what would be the sign of his coming and the end of the age (Matthew 24:3). The two-chapter discourse is Jesus' answer to both questions. The temple would be destroyed in AD 70, but his return would be in the distant future. Scholars do not agree on when Jesus finished answering one question and started answering the second (perhaps at Matthew 24:13-14? 24:15? 24:27? 24:29?). But there seems to be agreement that Jesus was speaking of his return by at least Matthew 24:36.

Jesus ended the discourse with an Old Testament reference (Noah and the flood), some cultural norms (men in fields and women grinding at the mills), and parables (master of the house and the thief, faithful and wise servant, ten virgins, talents, and the sheep and goats). Our text tells of the sheep and goats, which some say is not a true parable. Even if it is not, it certainly has parabolic elements.

The Lord of Judgment Will Come*Matthew 25:31-33*

The parables in Matthew 25 indicate we should “be ready” like the five wise virgins (vv. 1-13), “be prepared” like the two faithful servants (vv. 14-30), and “be loving” like the sheep in the separation from the goats. Jesus started this section with his favorite third person personal reference, *Son of Man*. There can be no confusion about what he meant by that divine title, for he then used the term *King* (vv. 34, 40).

When this Son of Man King comes, he will come in *glory* (shiny brilliance and weighty presence). He will come with his *angels*. He will take up the judgment of the *nations*

(global judgment) on his *glorious throne* (Revelation 20:11-15). The judgment will begin with the separation of people, similar to how a shepherd separates sheep from goats at day's end. In many ways, God's judgment involves separation from the presence of the king (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

The Lord of Judgment Says 'Come'*Matthew 25:34-40*

One of Jesus' favorite words was *come* (Matthew 11:28). He used it in reference to the sheep (people) *blessed* by his Father. These compassionate folks could take their *inheritance . . . prepared . . . since the creation of the world*. It was not as if they did their good deeds to be seen by men (Matthew 6:1) or in an attempt to earn their salvation (Galatians 2:16). In fact, they were surprised (probably due to their humility—vv. 37-39) when the king commended them.

They were invited in because their faith caused them to express their compassion with food, drink, hospitality, clothing, help with illness, and even by taking care of the needs of people who were in prison. When these good folks expressed surprise, the king answered by saying that when they acted compassionately to *the least of these brothers and sisters*, it was as if they were serving Jesus.

This text is misunderstood if one concludes that humanitarian effort earns heaven. It may also be misunderstood if applied generically—i.e., to all humanity (though we are to do good to all men—Galatians 6:10). “Brothers” in Matthew's Gospel refers to the Christian community. At the very least, Jesus might be commending Christians taking care of Christians.

The Lord of Judgment Says 'Go'*Matthew 25:41-46*

To the goats (uncompassionate people) on the left Jesus will say, “Depart” (i.e., go up and away). These people were *cursed* and will go into *eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels* (Revelation 20:7-10). Their lack of compassion was underlined with the same response (“*when did we see you hungry or thirsty?*”). While some have embraced what is called annihilationism (sinners simply die and cease to exist), church history is more on the side of *eternal punishment* being “forever dying.” That is due to the flip side of *eternal life* (which we think of as forever alive). Being forever alive sounds like the best of Christmas gifts. ■

APPLICATION

CARING FOR 'THE LEAST OF THESE'

BY DAVID FAUST

Jesus' teachings abound with vibrant analogies and illustrations. Don't build a house on sand. Don't put fresh wine in brittle wineskins. Recognize the growth potential in a tiny mustard seed. Value God's kingdom like a fine pearl or a hidden treasure.

Worried? Consider how God provides for birds. *Critical of others?* Don't be like a man with a two-by-four stuck in his eye trying to give someone else an eye exam. *Struggling to forgive?* After doing it 490 times, see if it comes more naturally. *Becoming too enamored with material things?* Don't be like a camel trying to squeeze through the eye of a needle.

In Matthew 25, Jesus compares himself to a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats. This Scripture passage teaches important truths about the Lord, and it has practical implications for us.

What It Says About Christ

His identity. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne" (Matthew 25:31). These are strong words about Jesus' identity. No mere mortal could make such claims. "Son of Man" is a messianic title (see Daniel 7:13-14), and who else but God can command heaven's angels and sit in the place of judgment on a glorious throne with "all the nations" gathered before him (v. 32)?

His authority. The "shepherd" (v. 32) is also the "King" (v. 34). Who else but the Sovereign Ruler of the universe has the right to separate all humanity into two groups—the saved and the lost? The sheep on the King's right side will be eternally blessed and rewarded, while the goats on his left "will go away to eternal punishment" (v. 46). Hell is an uncomfortable concept, but Jesus believed in it and warned about it multiple times. He came

to provide the remedy for sin so we don't have to perish and face the condemnation we deserve (John 3:16-19).

His sympathy. Heaven's King is not a tyrant. He sympathizes with our suffering and identifies with those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, inadequately clothed, homeless, and imprisoned. One criterion he applies in his role as judge is this: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these . . . you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

What It Says to Us

At Christmas we recall that God's Word became flesh—an innocent, helpless-looking baby lying in a manger. But that baby grew up to be the risen Lord, the ruler of all nations, the King of kings who possesses "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). Jesus' analogy of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 reminds us to respect his authority as judge of the world.

It also reminds us to treat others with justice, mercy, and generosity. Do you know people who are hospitalized, shut-in at home, or in prison? Go and visit them, just as you would visit Christ himself if you had the opportunity. Do you know someone who needs food, clothes, or housing? Step in with hands-on help or financial support just as you would if Christ himself were in need.

"Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). The way we care for "the least of these" shows what we value most.

Personal Challenge: Take time during the holidays to visit shut-ins, prisoners, or the sick. As part of your Christmas gift-giving, support individuals and ministries that care for the homeless, the imprisoned, and those who need clean water and nutritious food. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Over the past week, how did you explain to a believer, seeker, or unbeliever why you believe in the existence and the love of God?
2. In what ways are you prepared and still unprepared for Christmas?

Ask two people to read aloud **Matthew 25:31-46** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to paraphrase the passage in as much detail as possible.

3. How is Jesus pictured in this passage?
 - What does that say about his identity?
 - What does that say about his authority?
4. This passage contrasts two groups of people, depicted by Jesus as sheep and goats. Read verses 34 and 41 again. What contrasts do you see?
5. What other contrasts between the "sheep" and the "goats" do you see? *(Note to leader: Please read Mark Scott's "Study" on this passage beforehand; it will help provide vital theological context.)*
6. What do you learn about Jesus in this passage?
7. What do you learn about yourself?
8. In what ways will you serve the needy in our community, especially over the Christmas holiday?
9. At this time of year, we celebrate Jesus coming into this world as a baby. How will you use this passage as a reminder of who he has always been and always will be?
 - With whom will you share Jesus' identity as King, Judge, Shepherd, and Savior?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Matthew 2:1-12**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■