

Answers To The Final Exam

Matthew 25:31–46 · Pastor Chris Brown · Message #73

The big idea: How we treat people doesn't make us citizens of Heaven. It's the evidence of how a true citizen lives.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Plain text

= your group's guide. Same questions your group has in their hands.

Grey boxes and Leader Extras

= for you only. Tips, extra questions and background your group doesn't see.

THIS WEEK IN 30 SECONDS

The passage

The sheep and the goats. This is the last thing Jesus teaches in Matthew; the next verse (26:1) begins the road to the cross. Chapters 24 and 25 have been one long answer to "When will this happen?" Three parables told us to be ready. This one shows us what ready looks like.

Watch for

- **"So I get into heaven by helping people?"** Fruit, not payment.
- **"The least of these" as a political debate:** bring it back to the room.
- **Real questions about hell:** don't rush them, and don't let the room turn them into a debate.

A win this week

Everyone leaves knowing that loving people is the evidence of a life surrendered to Jesus, not the price of it, and with one person they'll show up for this week.

LISTEN: THIS WEEK'S LEADER PODCAST



Go behind the parable. Why would a shepherd split up sheep and goats in the first place? And why is everybody in this story so surprised? The leader podcast digs into the background, the history and the odd little details that make this week's questions easier to lead. Good for the drive to group, or while the coffee's brewing.

Scan the code or open the episode: share.transistor.fm/s/c3382472. Pass it on to your co-leader or host.

LEADER NOTES & LINKS

- **Social & Impact:** Still no date? There's no better week to plan an Impact Project. [Social ideas](#) · [Impact Projects](#)
- **Leader podcast:** a walkthrough of the questions, the tricky moments and what to say. northcoastleaders.transistor.fm
- **Monthly leader email:** behind-the-scenes news, stories and a recipe or two. [Subscribe](#)
- **Tell us:** a question, a win, or something great about someone in your group? [Send it here](#)
- **Post attendance:** northcoastchurch.com/attendance
- **Baptisms in November:** If anyone in your group has been thinking about it, this is the month to point them to. Dates by campus: northcoastchurch.com/baptisms.

SERMON NOTES: OUTLINE

Answers To The Final Exam

Jesus teaches clearly that some of us will make it **to Heaven**, and some of us **won't** · How we **treat people** does not make us a citizen of Heaven, but is **evidence** of how a true **citizen** lives · Our walk with God will become a **love** for all **people**, or it is not a **true** walk with God · Being prepared means surrendering our: **self, stuff, social circle** · Taking the midterm

Passages: Matthew 25:31–46; 10:40–42 · Daniel 7:9–14 · Ezekiel 34:11–24 · Joel 3:1–12 · John 5:22–29 · 2 Corinthians 5:10 · James 2:14–26 · Galatians 6:9–10 · Hebrews 13:1–3 · Proverbs 19:17 · John 3:16–17 · Ephesians 2:8–10

THE GROUP GUIDE *Exactly what your group has, with your leader notes*

These questions are designed to help groups discuss the weekend teaching while building relationships with each other and applying God's Word to our lives.

WARM UP

1. If you had an entire day free from responsibilities and had to spend it helping someone else, who would you help and what would you do?

LEADER NOTE

Tip: Let people dream big: a whole day on a friend's yard, a road trip to visit someone, a day at a shelter. Most of us say busyness is what keeps us from helping. Live It 2 comes back to what gets in the way.

2. Are you someone who naturally notices when others need help, or do you usually need someone to ask directly?

LEADER NOTE

Tip: There's no wrong answer. Some people see everything; some don't see it until it's in front of them. Both kinds show up in this passage, and neither group in the story saw what they were doing.

3. What is one thought or idea from this weekend's message that struck you or that you'd like to spend more time unpacking?

LEADER NOTE

Tip: Listen for who heard this as pressure ("I'm not doing enough") and who heard it as a warning about someone else. Both answers tell you where to slow down in Know It.

If the room is quiet: Ask what surprised them more, the people who got in or the people who didn't.

Optional extra: Try this week's Kinship Question (see Leader Extras).

KNOW IT

Re-read Matthew 25:31–46.

LEADER NOTE

Reading: Sixteen verses. Split it in three: the scene (vv31–33), the sheep (vv34–40), the goats (vv41–46). Notice that the conversation happens twice, almost word for word. That repetition is the point.

1. Both groups seem surprised when Jesus tells them they were either serving or neglecting Him through their treatment of "the least of these brothers and sisters." We understand why the second group was surprised by this, but why do you think it was so surprising for the righteous that Jesus said this was all done for Him?

LEADER NOTE

Tip: They weren't keeping score. If they'd been serving to earn their way in, they would have known exactly when they did it. They were people whose lives had been changed, so they did what changed people do.

Aha: Both groups ask almost the same question (v37 and v44). The sheep didn't know they'd done it; the goats didn't know they hadn't.

Read: Ephesians 2:8–10. Saved by grace, for good works, not by them. This is the same order Arnold's week ended on.

Watch for: "So I'm saved by what I do." Slow down. Nobody in this passage earns anything. The King says the kingdom was "prepared for you since the creation of the world" (v34). It was ready before any of them fed anybody.

2. So many times we think of sin and failure as the things we do wrong. Notice, Jesus points out that it was the things they didn't do that they will be judged for. How does that challenge our understanding of what it means to live a surrendered and transformed life?

LEADER NOTE

Tip: Read through the list in verses 42–43 again. Nothing on it is a crime. Every item is something they didn't do. Most of us think of surrender as giving up the bad stuff. Jesus adds the good we keep walking past.

Read: James 4:17 ("If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them") · 1 John 3:17–18.

Ask: Which is easier for you to notice in yourself: things you did wrong, or things you didn't do?

Careful: This can turn into guilt quickly. The goal isn't "you're not doing enough." It's "what has God put right in front of you?"

3. Sometimes following Jesus can feel like it requires grand gestures, but the examples Jesus gives in Matthew 25:31–46 were remarkably practical at the time—providing food/drink, welcoming strangers, caring for the sick, visiting prisoners. What do these examples tell us about the kind of love Jesus values?

LEADER NOTE

Tip: Nothing on Jesus' list needs a budget or a stage. It's food, water, a welcome, clothes, a visit. The love he's describing is close to home and shows up in person.

Read: Matthew 10:42. A cup of cold water counts.

Aha: One item on the list cost more than it looks. Visiting a prisoner meant bringing his food and being publicly tied to him (see Go Deeper).

Careful: If this drifts into policy or politics, bring it back to the room: "Who's in front of you this week?" Jesus is talking to individuals here, not voting blocs.

SHARE IT

1. We've been seeing throughout Matthew that saving grace and faith will transform a life. Is there something you are willing to share that has dramatically changed in your life since you began walking with Jesus?

LEADER NOTE

Tip: You go first. "Dramatically" can scare people off, so say out loud that it doesn't have to be a big story: patience you didn't used to have, a habit that faded, the way you talk to your kids. Change is usually easier for other people to see than for us.

If someone can't think of one: Ask the group. "What have you seen change in them?" Only do this if the group knows each other well.

2. Jesus identifies so closely with His people that He considers the way they're treated as the way He's being treated. Can you share a time when that truth changed how you treated someone, how you saw yourself, or a time you wish you'd remembered it?

LEADER NOTE

Tip: There are three doors in this question. Don't skip the middle one: if Jesus takes the way people treat you personally, that says something about how much you matter to him.

Read: Matthew 10:40 ("Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me") · Acts 9:4. Jesus asks Saul, "Why do you persecute me?"

Careful: "A time you wish you'd remembered it" can get heavy. Let people share as much or as little as they want, and don't push for details.

LIVE IT

1. This weekend we read the last words of Jesus' teaching in Matthew before He heads to the cross. Imagine coming home today and finding Jesus sitting at your kitchen table. He says, "I've told you what the final exam is going to look like. This is your midterm. How are you doing with your self, your stuff, and the people in your life? And what do you need My help with?" How would you answer both questions?

LEADER NOTE

Tip: Self, stuff and the people in your life are the three things the message said being prepared means surrendering. Notice the tone, too. This isn't an exam proctor trying to catch you. It's a teacher who wants you to pass and gives you the answers ahead of time. That's what Matthew 25 is.

Careful: Some people will hear "how are you doing" as a grade. If someone sounds discouraged, the second question is the one to linger on: what do you need His help with?

2. In the story this weekend, we saw missed opportunities to love others like Jesus. What can keep us from noticing and responding to the needs of others, and how can we get better at both?

LEADER NOTE

Tip: Expect busyness first. Think back to the warm up: nobody gets a free day, but most people can find two hours. Also listen for the noticers and the non-noticers from Warm Up 2. They'll need different help.

Make it concrete: Each person names one person and one action for this week. Write them down (with their OK) and ask next week.

Close: Pray for the people your group named, by name.

You don't have to have every answer. Create safety, guide reflection, point people to Jesus. Thank you for leading.

LEADER EXTRAS *Not in your group's guide*

OPTIONAL EXTRA: KINSHIP QUESTION

Who was kind to you at a time when they had no reason to be? Do they know it mattered?

How: Ask it after the Warm Up. Go around the circle, 60–90 seconds each, and say out loud that passing is fine. It isn't about the sermon, and it doesn't need to be. It just sits next to a passage where people did kind things and never knew how much they mattered. If someone says "no, they don't know," you've got an easy Live It. **Tried it? Tell us how it went**

OPTIONAL EXTRA: MEMORIZE IT

Matthew 25:40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

How: Say it together to close the night and once more to open next week.

BE READY: WHAT TO SAY

"So I get to heaven by helping people?" No one in this passage earns anything. The kingdom was prepared for them before the world began (v34). "What changes if serving is the evidence instead of the payment?"	"Does God really send people to hell?" Look at verse 41: the fire was "prepared for the devil and his angels," not for people. The kingdom was prepared for people (v34). Don't try to settle the whole doctrine in one night. "What makes that hard for you?" Then listen.
"Well, the people who really need to hear this are..." A party, a group, someone on the news. Gently bring it back to the room. Jesus is talking to the people in front of him about the people in front of them. "Who's the person in front of you this week?"	"I haven't done any of this. I'm a goat." The goats never asked the question. Someone worried about it is usually someone the Spirit is working on. Jesus gave the answers to the final exam ahead of time so we can respond to them. "Who's one person you could start with this week?"

SET THE ROOM

Before group, think of one real need you know about (a group member, a neighbor, a local ministry) so Live It has somewhere concrete to land if the room goes quiet. Have a notecard ready for the names people share.

GO DEEPER: FOR YOUR PREP

The last thing Jesus teaches in Matthew Matthew is built around five big teaching sections, and each one ends with almost the same sentence: "When Jesus had finished saying these things..." (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The last one, right after this passage, says "all these things." The teaching is finished. Next stop: the cross.	Sheep and goats grazed together In Jesus' day mixed flocks grazed side by side all day. Commentators often note that shepherds separated them at night, when the goats needed to be kept warm. From the outside, you couldn't tell them apart until the separating.	"One like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven" Verse 31 echoes Daniel 7:13–14, where the Son of Man receives authority over "all nations and peoples of every language." Jesus is claiming that throne for himself, days before his trial.
The Great Shepherd judges the flock Ezekiel 34:17: "I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats." Jesus is using the prophets' language for God himself.	The right hand The right side was the place of honor and favor (Psalm 110:1). Nobody listening would have missed the picture.	Who are "the least of these"? Two readings. Many commentators read "these brothers and sisters of mine" as Jesus' followers, since Matthew uses "my brothers" that way (12:48–50; 28:10) and 10:42 promises a reward for a cup of water given to "one of these little ones" because he's a disciple. Others read it as anyone in need. Either way, the people who are hungry, sick or in prison are in front of us to serve.

Visiting prisoners took courage Prisons in the Roman world often didn't feed inmates. Friends and family brought food, and visiting meant being publicly associated with the prisoner. Paul thanks Onesiphorus for not being "ashamed of my chains" (2 Timothy 1:16–17). Hebrews 13:3 says to remember prisoners "as if you were together with them in prison."	Prepared for you / prepared for the devil Verse 34: the kingdom "prepared for you since the creation of the world." Verse 41: the fire "prepared for the devil and his angels." Heaven was made with people in mind. Hell wasn't.	Same word, both sides Verse 46 uses the same Greek word (aionios) for "eternal" punishment and "eternal" life. Jesus treats both as equally real and lasting.
C.S. Lewis on hell In The Problem of Pain, Lewis wrote that "the doors of hell are locked on the inside." Useful if someone in your group pictures God as eager to shut people out.		