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Agape Grace: The Recipients

#1351-B

Series: God's Amazing Grace



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Agape Grace: The Recipients

Our loving God, so often we come into Your presence to pray and we are overcome or overwhelmed with the magnitude of what needs to be communicated. How thankful we are that You have told us, You know what we have need of even before we ask. How grateful we are that You have told us as well, Father, that the Spirit, Himself, makes intercession for us even with groanings that cannot be uttered.

You know our hearts. You know our needs. You know the needs of the whole world. But You have told us to ask and to keep on asking that we may receive, and that You may be glorified. So, we come this morning, Father, and bring these to You we have mentioned, and pray for Your grace, Your healing, Your strength, and Your testimony.

Father, we acknowledge that only You can teach, so we pray You will be our teacher; that we would be hidden behind Jesus, that only He would be seen and only He would be heard. Once again, Father, a seemingly difficult subject, and yet, something Father, that we feel Your Word has to say to us. Speak to us, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

It was a cold, dreary kind of night. The wind was whistling through the trees with such force that it seemed as though the trunks of those old oaks were literally shaking in disbelief. A cold, steady drizzle seemed to be the coating that covered the horizon with a cloak of uncertainty, and the sidewalks were left damp and the streets dangerous.

As the temperature hovered near the freezing mark, the rain was about to turn to ice. John and Katherine sort of braced for the wintry blast as they emerged from their evening of delightful dining at the Fairview Hotel. It had been a night to remember. Not only was it their tenth wedding anniversary, but it was the celebration of John's promotion at work. From director of

marketing to CEO was hardly a minor shift. It was a quantum leap to the top of the heap, and there he was. Not even such inclement weather would dampen their enthusiasm.

As they rounded the corner toward the parking garage that adjoined his corporate headquarters, he suddenly leaped backward. He saw some movement in the bushes just ahead. Grabbing Katherine, he lunged backward, fearing someone was lying in wait to rob them. She was wearing her new mink stole, and he was wearing his \$1,000.00 Rolex. In today's world, you almost expected to be robbed.

A figure emerged from the bushes. John saw no gun, but he bolted and began to shout, "Police, police!" His would-be attacker slouched to the ground in disbelief. "Oh, sir," he said, seemingly about to cry, "I mean you no harm. I am homeless, and it is so cold. I was wondering if you could spare me even so much as the cost of a cup of warm coffee. You see, the homeless shelter is full tonight, and I am so very cold."

Katherine was shaking, but not from the cold. Scenes of her husband lying dead on the sidewalk were playing in the theater of her mind. John, however, seemed suddenly at ease and unafraid. "Katherine," he responded, "this man is our Jesus." Kathy flinched as though her husband's newfound corporate authority had caused a sudden failure of the brain's most basic functions.

"Don't you remember?" John went on. "Last Sunday. The message on love. The message on meeting the needs of the least of these? This man could be Jesus. We asked God to send our way the least of these. Remember?" With that, the new chairman of Ryan Industries reached out his hand to the shivering, dirty, homeless man who stood still crouched beneath the bushes frightened, and said, "Come inside my office where it's warm, and I'll give you some coffee and a snack from the snack machine. Then my wife and I will drive you to a motel and see that you have a warm bed to sleep in. Tomorrow, you call me, and we'll help you find a job and a place to stay permanently. God loves you, my friend," John added, now beaming with enthusiasm. "And we love you, too." The man began to cry. You see, no one had ever told him they loved him before. "What did you mean I might be Jesus?" he said. "I don't know much about Jesus, but wasn't He supposed to be God?"

It was a night to remember. The man went inside, and indeed

Agape Grace: The Recipients

it was warmer. But more than that, he received a kind of warmth he had never known before. He was accepted by someone who had no reason to accept him, and he met someone he had never met before. He met his Creator God and his Savior.

His life was changed. But more than that, so were John's and Katherine's lives changed. They took God at His Word and experienced agape grace. They actually loved someone they would not have been able to love a week ago.

It all started when they listened to a study of Matthew, chapter 25, and began to take it seriously. In case that passage is not familiar to you, and even if it is, let's read it again:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;

I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?

When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;

I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you

Agape Grace: The Recipients

did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

“Then they also will answer Him, 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?’

Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’

And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:31-46 NKJV)

Now, I would have you to be well aware, there are both kingdom principles and physical issues involved in this passage. It’s a difficult passage theologically. There are national judgments involved; there are personal warnings involved. It is theologically complex. It touches on nerve ends that run from the capitols of the world to the ghettos of your city and mine. Because of the complexity, it is easy to get entangled in the theology of it and miss the urgency of it. It is there that the appropriation of God’s grace comes into play, and we want to focus on some thoughts comparing Scripture with Scripture. Because huddled underneath this there is hidden, if you will, in this passage, a scathing rebuke of the social unconcern of the church. In light of the rest of God’s teaching on the subject, we’re going to try to see how to keep a balance, this week and next, on those issues. It is not natural; therefore, it must be supernatural.

Six categories of people are listed here in this passage. Let’s remind ourselves of them. They are:

- 1- the hungry (I hate to use that word in this class.)
- 2- the thirsty
- 3- the strangers
- 4- those who are without clothing
- 5- those who are sick
- 6- those who are in prison.

Now, to clear up one theological issue, I would encourage you at the outset, to remember there are no exceptions made based on whether or not they are hungry, thirsty or in prison because of what they have done, or whether they are caught up in one of life’s “unfair crises.” These are simply categories of people who are hurting, and without someone to show them mercy, they

will continue to suffer. There are also absolutely no geographical boundaries or limitations listed. It doesn't limit the hungry to those in your city or your neighborhood. The whole world is involved, and in today's global community that means a whole different look at missions.

One thing that constantly emerges when this passage is studied, is the reminder that the personal issue of salvation isn't resting on whether or not you or I relieve suffering. But there is a serious warning that meeting needs with agape love is proof of our salvation and proof that the church is in the will of God. There is also a strong indication that there are national judgments involved for nations who fail to meet the needs of their people, particularly the needs of Christians or Jews. Conversely, those countries who have persecuted either the Jew or the Christian will obviously at some point, pay at the hand of God. This passage indicates when they do that, they are persecuting Christ, Himself. So, the issues are complex. We are going to focus primarily on the personal application that I believe calls for some soul-searching.

Let's start out by looking at the words found in those six categories, and see what they mean. Once we understand who it is we are dealing with, then we will go back and look at what we are to do.

1- The hungry- πεινάω peinao {pi-nah'-o}:

- a) to hunger
- b) to suffer want
- c) to be in need.

The literal meaning of it here is, those people who are suffering for want of food. They may be the homeless in the city who, for whatever reason, have no way to obtain food. They may be Christians in Africa or Russia who are living on scraps of food, while we are trying to figure out whether we need two or three desserts. Scripture indicates that if we see them going hungry and we have all we need or more than we need compared to them and do nothing, we are refusing to feed Jesus. That's what it says. And basically, it's as though Jesus had knocked on the door of our kitchen and asked us if we had anything to eat. We looked around and said, "No, I think we need it all for ourselves."

Conversely, if we see someone in need without enough food, and we take some of what we have and offer it to them, it's the same as having Jesus walk down the street and offering Him

some of what we have. He takes it that personally.

2- The thirsty- διψᾶω dipsao {dip-sah'-o}:

- a) to suffer from lack of water
- b) figuratively – the need to satisfy spiritual thirst.

Hungering and thirsting in Scripture often has double meanings. Jesus spoke of the “bread come down from heaven” and of “living water.” He said if you drank of living water, you would never thirst again. So, Jesus spoke often of spiritual food and spiritual drink, and many times He used the physical illustration as a portrait of the spiritual. But in this passage, we are dealing with actual physical thirst. So often, thirsting is an even deeper need than hunger because it provides that which sustains life so you can go seek after the food that would meet your needs.

3- The stranger- ξένος xenos {xen'-os}:

(You don't need to be strange to be a stranger. If you did, we would have a room full of strangers.) The literal meaning of the Greek word is to be:

- a) a foreigner; an alien
- b) one who is entertained or receives hospitality or lodging.

The word stranger used here, is someone in need of a place to stay. It may be someone from another country; it may be an alien. I'm not thinking from Mars, but from another country. Someone who has no roots here, or has no place to stay. It may be a brother or sister in the faith who is in need of lodging for a little time. And it has to do with our unselfishness with the home God has given us. Is it ours, or is God the owner of the establishment we call “home?” Is He free to be the gatekeeper who brings anyone He pleases into the realm of our hospitality?

Do you chafe over sharing your life or lodging with others, particularly those who may not be socially or economically in your world? If so, according to this passage, you are asking Jesus to go somewhere else for the night. He's experienced that before. Scripture says, the Son of man had no place to lay His head. There was no room for Him even to be born, except in a stable. He understands rejection, but it breaks His heart.

4- The naked- γυμνός gumnos {goom-nos'}: The Greek word literally means three things. Those who are:

- a) unclad

Agape Grace: The Recipients

- b) ill clad
- c) partially clad.

It literally means those who do not have adequate clothing to wear; be it adequate in the form of having nothing, not having enough to keep warm, or not having enough to meet the social requirements of the world into which they have been thrust. It could be the homeless on the street who have only enough clothing to cover themselves, but not enough to keep warm in the frigid blast of winter. Or, it could include those who live in a world that condemns them because they do not have the clothes to wear to be accepted.

Mostly, it is referring to those here, who just don't have enough clothes to keep warm or clean. I don't know about you, but if you drive up to a traffic light, sometimes people will wrap on your window. You'll look out the window and there is someone dressed in rags, in tattered clothing, with a cardboard sign. We tend to recoil when someone looks at us like that or enters a mall or a restaurant dressed like that. Even when they come into church and their clothing indicates they are destitute. Instead of praying for them or offering to help them or at least inquiring about their welfare, we are more likely to look the other way, move to another table, or pretend we didn't see them.

When we hear about thousands or millions in other countries who are homeless, the victims of religious persecution, ethnic cleansing or political upheaval, we change channels lest our consciences be pricked. We see films of missionaries laboring among those who have been stripped of their dignity and their resources, and we condemn the dictator or the government that brought it about. But, seldom do we see that the naked need to be clothed, and in so doing, their awareness of God's love heightens so they will listen to the good news and be covered once and for all by the blood of Jesus Christ.

5- The sick- ἀσθενέω astheneo {as-then-eh'-o}: It means in any form:

- a) to be weak, feeble, or without strength
- b) needy
- c) sick.

It's those who have no strength, physically. They may be weak from sickness, from deformity, from hunger, or from age, but they are unable to physically do what the average person can

do. They need to be loved. They need to be helped. They need to be visited, called, written to, and cared for. They need to be aware that their infirmity or their age is not a cause for rejection. We have all the more reason to reach out to them, to love them. We live in a society today where age is becoming more and more a mixed blessing. Thinking that life is here and now, society has done whatever it can to keep people alive longer and longer, while relegating them to an institutional kind of existence, devoid of compassion and a meaningful lifestyle. Old people have become the lepers of our day. We keep them at arm's-length, but we keep them.

Don't we do the same thing with the handicapped? We champion their causes, give them better parking places, bigger rest rooms, and better access to public buildings, all the while calling attention to their deficiencies rather than seeing those deficiencies as a God-given opportunity for the body of Christ to do what it was meant to do. We vote for their causes but we look the other way when they come into our churches. We *patronize* them. Jesus *touched* them. We think we are heroes for accepting them. Jesus loved them. Oh, how He loved them.

The sixth group is a difficult group:

6- The prisoners- φυλακε phulake {foo-lak-ay'}: Those in prison. It's used in the passage 36 times. It means:

- a) to be imprisoned
- b) to be held.

The word δεσμιό desmios {des'-mee-os} is the prisoner, himself. It means:

- a) one who is in bonds, in chains, locked up.

In our generation there are a few people and a few organizations—we'll look at that more next week—who do reach out and minister love to those who are incarcerated. Praise God. But Jesus wasn't speaking here of an extracurricular ministry to be assigned to a handful. He was speaking to the everyday responsibility of the local church and the average Christian. We are supposed to pray for, love, and reach out to prisoners, because one physically imprisoned is a great candidate to be set free in their spirit. And, this is true.

I wish I could read you some letters—but I won't take time to do it—that we have received from prisoners. The greatest

Agape Grace: The Recipients

spiritual renewal in many cases, going on in our generation, is happening behind prison walls. Many around the world are in prison because of unjust persecution of their faith in Christ. They should be doubly loved. But many are in prison because they have committed crimes. Once in prison, they have cried out to God and been forgiven, and while they must serve their sentences, maybe for life, as part of the sowing and reaping, the church, according to Scripture, now has a responsibility to feed them spiritually and reach out to them, knowing they are longing for an inner freedom that supersedes the bonds of prison walls.

Throughout the United States, and it is true in most other countries as well, there are men and women who are in prison physically, who are set free spiritually, and have come to grips with their own inabilities apart from God. Many of them have nothing but time, and are filling that time with God. The “gray area” of Christianity often does not exist in prison. You either take a stand for Christ or you stand with everyone else. It is a proving ground; it is a place where lives can be transformed. But today, we would rather focus more of our time on continuing to baby lukewarm Christians with whom we fellowship, rather than to feel a need to visit the prisons, write to the prisoners, or send them materials to help them grow. Jesus said when you do that, you have failed to minister to Him.

Those are the six categories as Christians, we are never to neglect. If you are justifying your position or the position of the church based on the fact that you spiritualized or nationalized this passage, let’s go through the rest of Scripture and see what God may be saying to us.

I want to do a brief a walk-through and look up one English word in the Hebrew and the Greek and trace it through Scripture. That word is “poor.” You will see, it covers all six of those groups.

The Hebrew words translated are:

ld- {δαλ} literally translated 43 times in the Old Testament.

- 1) Those who are circumstantially low for whatever reason. They could be poor; they could be weak.

Twot- {τωοτ}: Used in the Greek 4 times.

- 1) He or she who is hapless or unfortunate.

Pe- ανιψ {aw-nee’} is used 58 times. It literally means anyone who is:

Agape Grace: The Recipients

- 1) poor
- 2) afflicted
- 3) wretched
- 4) needy
- 5) humbled by lowliness.

It describes anyone who has fallen on bad times; anyone who is weak, afflicted, or hurting. It may be someone with no food, no drink, or no clothes. It may be a stranger with no home, the victim of sickness, or a prisoner.

In the New Testament, the corresponding Greek word that kind of wraps all of these together, you will find used over and over and over in Scripture. It is used 34 times at least in the New Testament.

Ptochos- πτοχός {pto-khos} It literally means:

- 1) anyone reduced to begging
- 2) destitute of wealth, influence or position
- 3) lowly or afflicted
- 4) poor or needy
- 5) lacking in anything.

So this word poor, can really be described as anyone from a destitute beggar to someone who is just powerless to accomplish what they need to without help. It's used to describe those who have fallen on hard times, maybe by circumstances beyond their control or maybe by their own choices. Now what does the Scripture say about that word? The word, poor, is used in the Hebrew and the Greek over 200 times. Obviously, we don't have time—and you can take a deep breath; I'm not going to share those 200 verses with you. I could see some of you looking at your watches already. But I do want to point out seven principles and give you some Scriptures to meditate on this week, so you can get the mind of God where the poor are concerned; not just those who are destitute, but that's part of it.

1- God has a special place in His heart for the poor, unfortunate or hurting.

Man tends to look with favor on the rich and successful and give them priority. God looks with favor, the Scripture says, in a different way on the poor and the needy.

He raises the poor from the dust And lifts the beggar from

Agape Grace: The Recipients

the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. “For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, And He has set the world upon them.” [He can do it and He will!] (I Samuel 2:8)

Here’s an incredibly good memory verse:

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. (Isaiah 41:17)

2- God has vowed to protect the poor in a special way.

I will greatly praise the LORD with my mouth; Yes, I will praise Him among the multitude.

For He shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those who condemn him. (Psalm 109:30,31 NKJV)

I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, And justice for the poor. (Psalm 140:12 NKJV)

For He will deliver the needy when he cries; the poor also, and him who has no helper.

He shall spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy. (Psalm 72:12,13 NKJV)

3- God sees the poor as a special field, spiritually, that is ripe unto harvest.

The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because he has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord! [In other words, He sent me to the hurting.] (Luke 4:18 NKJV)

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him?

But you have dishonored the poor man. (James 2:5,6a NKJV)

4- God blesses the leader who blesses the poor.

The king who judges the poor with truth, His throne shall be established for ever. (Proverbs 29:14 NKJV)

Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:9 NKJV)

5- God blesses the Christian who blesses the poor.

Blessed is he who considers the poor; the LORD will deliver

Agape Grace: The Recipients

him in time of trouble. (Psalm 41:1 NKJV)

Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. (Psalm 82:3 NKJV)

If there is among you a poor man of your brethren within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, (Deuteronomy 15:7 NKJV)

Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked. (Psalm 82:4 NKJV)

Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, and follow Me.” (Matthew 19:21 NKJV)

6- God demands that the church not ever favor the rich or humiliate or reject the poor.

She extends her hands to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. (Proverbs 31:20 NKJV)

For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, [he’s just dressed awful—loose translation]

And you pay attention to the one wearing fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here under my footstool,” [sit over here where you won’t be a bother]

Have you not then shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:2-4 NKJV)

7- God expects the church to focus on ministering to the poor.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. (Luke 14:13 NKJV)

In our next lesson, we will look at some specific things that we, as individuals in the church can do, to change the course of ministering to the poor without changing our doctrinal emphasis or reducing our call to evangelism. You cannot separate the call to evangelism from the call to minister to the poor. The trend in today’s church is away from meeting human need and away from taking the gospel to the “least of these” because “the least of these” aren’t our kind and they don’t fit here. They aren’t our kind? I think they are. I think they are us apart from the grace of God, and I think they are our mission field according to the Word of God. How dare we pick and choose who we are willing to touch,

love and reach out to? How dare we ignore the very people God said in Scripture, we must not ignore.

I want to ask some questions. Don't answer, except to the Lord.

1- Are we willing to love the people Jesus loved?

2- Are we willing to ask Him for the grace to do it, because it isn't natural?

3- Are we willing to accept that when we do, we are actually ministering to Him?

4- Are we willing to accept that when we don't, we are actually saying to Him, "Go away, Jesus. You're not my kind?"

5- Are we willing to become vulnerable, if need be, to open our homes and our hearts to people we normally would not touch?

6- If so, are we willing to tell God that we're willing?

Jesus shocked the religious world when He came to earth. Messiah was expected to go to the religious elite, work within the system, bless the educated, the skilled, the attractive, and the strong. He was expected to pick the winners of this world, the wise of this world, and the mighty of this world, and use their strength, their wisdom, and their might as the basis for His kingdom.

He was expected to descend as a King and rule from a throne. Instead, He descended as a servant and He washed feet, healed lepers, raised the dead, and loved losers. He went to the poor, the lame, the weak and the dying, *because they knew they had a need*. He met the needs of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, and the prisoner, *because they knew without Him, they had nothing*.

Then He went back to the Father. And when He did, He was saying to us, "As the Father sent Me, so send I you." And, beloved, because of a generation of abuses from what we call the "social gospel," we have allowed Satan to shift our emphasis so far from ministering to those Jesus sent us to, to those who are socially and economically acceptable. We are willing to send a few of our chosen ones to the mission field where the poor and needy are. We see films and slides at mission conference time and weep for a moment. Then we go back to doing what we have always done in order to create situations that will be acceptable to people like

Agape Grace: The Recipients

us. And we wonder why the church seems to attract so few new converts, and why the world seems so unimpressed with this “gospel of love” we have.

I'll tell you why. They are unimpressed because we have forgotten our calling. We are to come here to get fed, to grow, and have fellowship. Then we are to leave here and go where Jesus went; to the hospitals, the prisons, the orphanages, the nursing homes, the ghettos, the halfway houses where the hurting are, where the dying are, where the suffering are. And we are to touch them, not preach down to them. We are to get down before them like Jesus did, look up to them and let them know that if Jesus were here, He would wash their feet, heal their wounds, touch their fevered brow, wrap His precious arms around their imprisoned souls, and reach out His nail-scarred hands to feed their hungry stomachs. Then He would tell them what love is and where it came from, and how they could experience His taking them to a cross. And they would listen, because they would experience love.

Beloved, the church needs to go to where the dirty people live, where the hungry people live, where the dying people live, as individuals and as a body. We need to become as vulnerable as Jesus was or we will never become as effective as Jesus intended. In this age of affluence, we tend to think everyone is blessed, and if they aren't, they are either lazy or the government isn't doing its job. Yet, all around us and all around the world are the very people Jesus spent His life touching; hungry, lonely, homeless, naked, imprisoned people, who apart from something supernatural, have no hope. They are the ones most likely to listen, but not if we say, “Go, be warm and filled.”

If this study is offensive to you, and I can tell by the looks on your faces, that to some of you it may be, be sure to skip next week. Because, by God's grace, we are going to look seriously at what might do as individuals.

In the meantime, I would ask each of you to spend a week praying; asking God to open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things out of His Word about our calling to the poor and needy. We must keep it in balance. That's what Satan doesn't like. We must not run from it either. So, are you willing to tell God that you want to reach out and touch whoever He wants you to reach? Are you willing to go through the list of those groups

Agape Grace: The Recipients

Jesus mentioned and ask Him if you are available to the least of these?

Are you willing to begin praying for the homeless, the prisoner, the terminally ill, the jobless, the friendless, the orphan? How many of you are still praying for the orphans in North Korea? Or did we write out a check or shoot up a prayer and leave it at that. Are you willing to examine what you have in light of what others might have and share more generously with the least of these?

Are you willing to personally go to the prisons, the nursing homes, the halfway houses, and the hospitals, and share your faith and your life? Are you willing to reexamine who is welcome in your home? Could it be that God is calling some of you to open your home to people who aren't your kind, whatever that is? Are you willing to reexamine your racial and economic prejudices and call them sin? Are you willing to open your eyes to the crying, the hurting, and the grieving that you meet on a daily basis, and get involved in their lives rather than looking the other way?

Beloved, the question isn't, are you able; you're not. The question is are you willing? It isn't natural. It has to be supernatural; and therefore, it has to happen by grace. God isn't asking you to do something only He can do. He wants you to examine His Word, surrender to His will, and ask Him for the grace to do whatever He calls you to do. That's what this series is all about.

Before you ask, remember one thing. He will do it. You say, "How do you know?" Because we learned, this morning, that it is His will.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

And if we know that He hear us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

(I John 5:14,15 NKJV)

He will do it, if we ask. So, what I ask, in closing, is simply this. Are you willing?

Let's pray.

Our Father and our God, we pray that You would take this difficult subject and these difficult passages, and speak individually and collectively by Your Holy Spirit, to each of our hearts, and that we would respond appropriately and

Agape Grace: The Recipients

immediately to whatever You lead us to do. May our hearts burn within us, Father, to do Your will.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

A Challenge to Further Study

1- Take the words used to describe those six groups listed in Matthew 25, and cross-reference them throughout Scripture, seeing what else God has to say about each group. Then go to prayer and personalize the challenges and the promises you have found.

2- Do a study of the word “poor” and group some of the other 200 references under the seven principles found on pages 11-13. Try to examine places in Scripture where God used the needs of the poor to glorify His name or to lead them to Himself.

A Challenge to Further Application

1- Use time this week in your time alone with God to examine your heart attitude towards the poor, the hungry, the prisoner, the sick, the afflicted, the destitute. What thoughts do you have when you see them? What has influenced you the most in your prejudices?

Agape Grace: The Recipients

2- Ask God to open your eyes to the commandments of Scripture and the promises of Scripture where the poor and needy are concerned. What could you do *personally* to make yourself more available to those nobody seems to want to love?

3- How available are you to go to nursing homes to visit people who are unpleasant to look at, difficult to communicate with, and often not responsive? Do you see loving them as loving Jesus? When was the last time you made yourself available to go to a prison or write to a prisoner and share the love of Christ? How difficult is it for your heart to break when you see the homeless or starving people of other lands? What do you do when you become aware of their needs?

4- How open is your home to others? How open is your home to those you would not normally fellowship with? Is the “stranger” welcome in your home? Could you be telling Jesus to “go away”?

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize and meditate on Matthew 25:34-40 or Psalm 41:1

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(08.04.22.dvd)