

The First Will Be Last And The Last Will Be First

Introduction:

Today we are going to be continuing our series on “The Life of Jesus: Matthew Edition” Throughout the Gospel of Matthew one of Jesus’ main themes has been the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact this idea of proclaiming the kingdom of heaven is so central to Jesus’ ministry that when he sent out the 12 disciples in Matthew 10 he instructed them to “preach saying, ‘the kingdom of heaven has come near.’” The basic message of the Kingdom of Heaven is that Jesus is the one true King he is coming again to establish his kingdom but right now he is calling all people to be free from the kingdom of sin and darkness and live as citizens of His kingdom and members of His household. Jesus uses many different ways to explain what the kingdom of heaven is all about and what it means to live as a member of Christ’s Kingdom. But one phrase he uses time and time again is “The first shall be last and the last shall be first.” Now this is a confusing passage...

(Jeffery)

That's one of the great things about moving through the Gospel of Matthew.

In fact the passage we are looking at today is surrounded by Peter asking what those who have been with Jesus since the beginning will receive as their reward and James and John's Mom coming and asking Jesus to guarantee that they can have a special place of authority on the kingdom.

So as we look at Jesus' words in Matthew 20:1-16 we are going to asking three questions.

1. What does Jesus mean when he says the first will be last and the last will be first.
2. What does this tell us about who God is?
3. How should we reflect the image of God in response to this passage?

So with those three questions in mind lets pray and then dive into the text.

Matthew 19:30-20:2

- Included 19:30
 - Book end
- Explanation of repeated phrase
 - Parable
- A common situation 1 century Israel
 - Many people did not own property
 - Landowner
 - Follows Jewish norms
- Early in the morning 5 or 6am
- Denarius
 - Standard daily wages
 - KJV Penny

So the landowner hires these guys early in the morning and agrees to pay them a denarius at the end of the day, but as we will see the landowner continues to come back and hire more people...

Matthew 20:4-7

- The land owner continues to go back
 - 9am
 - noon
 - 3pm
 - 5-m
- Besides the time difference 2 things are different then the first group
 - They are described as being idle
 - Not due to laziness but because they have not been hired
 - He does not negotiate wages
- Cyril of Alexandria
 - Allegorizing

So up to this point nothing the landowner has done would be that unusual for a real landowner during that time but that is about to change...

Matthew 20:8-10

- Evening 6 or 7
- Commanded in lev and deut
- Last people first
- Each receive a whole days wages
- First people come expecting more

Matthew 20:11-16

- The laborers at the beginning of the day rightly confused
- Landowner points out they have no right to be angry
 - Not their money
 - Fair wage
 - Agreed upon wage
 - Upset not because they felt they got an unfair wage but because they believed the other person got too much
- Utter absurdity
 - No power
 - No authority
 - No land
 - Completely dependent upon the landowner
 - Yet they seek to correct him for being too generous
 - They seek to rob the authority of the landowner
 - Unfortunately humans have the tendency even today to look at others and demand they meet our standards
 - We still seek to place ourselves on the throne and demand that others measure up to our expectations
- Book end

What does Jesus mean when he says the first will be last and the last will be first?

- Not a flip flopping in which you are punished because you strived for righteousness or accomplished much
- Not a road map for advancement in the kingdom of heaven
- The assurance that the gift of eternal life is freely given for all who come to Jesus
 - Thief on the cross
 - Peter
 - Drug addict to pleads for mercy
 - Mother who sacrificed all her life to teach her children about the love of God
- Eternal life cannot be earned
- It is the free gift of grace purchased and secured by the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - Open for you and for me
 - When Jesus says the first will be last and the last will be first he is saying that the gift of eternal life in the presence of God is one that is not earned but is a gift of unmerited grace.

What does this tell us about who God is?

- Murderer
 - Do not understand the wretchedness of their own sin
 - The only sinner on the earth
 - All of us are guilty of sin and worthy of death
- We scoff at God's grace for a murderer and while expecting grace for ourselves
 - We fall into the same sin that over took Adam and Eve and try to put ourselves in the place of God
 - Make ourselves judge of the earth
- This parable teaches tells us that God is the only judge, the only one with the authority to forgive sins and he has chosen to offer eternal life in his presence as a free gift unmerited grace.

How should we reflect the image of God in response to this passage?

- Live your life as one who has received unmerited grace.
 - Know God Love God Serve others.
- This means
 - Extend grace to
 - Spouses
 - Siblings
 - Children
 - Friends
 - Enemies
 - Seek reconciliation
 - Forgive others
 - Value reformation and renewal over retribution.
- The best practical advice I have heard when it comes to living this out
 - Do not act like people owe you anything
 - Healthy relationships will include mutual service
 - A list of expectations
 - Especially unvoiced expectations destroys relationships
 - Marriage & Grandpa

Final statement

We are called to live as citizens of God's kingdom, and members of his household. That means we are representatives of the God who has given us the assurance of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ not based on works but on unmerited grace. People are too precious to God and the price that has been paid for their souls is too high for us not to reflect God's image and extend unmerited grace to others

Lets pray.