



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

61 – First and Last

Announcements:

3/5 @5:00 -

*Joint Service at
La Luz Bible*

3/7 @6:30 -

*Women's
Bible Study*

3/8 @7:00 -

Prayer

3/9 @6:30 -

Grace Group

3/12 @8:30 -

Sunday School

3/13 @6:30 -

*Men's Discipleship
- Question 8*

ICE BREAKER: Do you have a testimony about the perfect timing of God?

READ: Matthew 19:30-20:16

Having spent my life either in Sunday School, or teaching Sunday School, or just hanging out with young people in general there is one thing that I find to be almost universal and a guarantee. That is whenever you line up young church people for any reason whatsoever you will hear the kid in the back say: "Well I don't care, because the first shall be last and the last first!" Now when kids say this it is a fairly transparent attempt to make themselves feel better about being at the end of the line, but Jesus said this same exact thing twice (once right before this parable, and once at the end) so it would be worth our time and attention to try and understand what exactly is Jesus saying. The difficulty lies in understanding what *exactly* Jesus means when he talks about "the last". It is (probably) not every line that anyone has ever stood in, so what is it? It turns out that there are two major camps that people fall into, and determining who is correct is more difficult here than it is in many other parables that we have looked at. So today we will try and understand the difficulty at the center to have a better understanding of what Jesus was saying.

The first camp is that Jesus is referring to *time*. In this type of reading there are two ways to think through this. One is on a sort of global level. There will be some who are called to Jesus early in his ministry (like the disciples) and some called later (like much, much later. Think 2000 years later and us!). Here the idea of not grumbling and begrudging has to do with understanding that there is a time for everything, so it was the disciples call to plant the church and our job to grow, They got to see Jesus and some generation (maybe us, maybe not) will be the one to see him come back, there is no greater or lessor, but the last shall be first and the first last. The second way to understand this temporarily is individually. Here we can see that some people are called to Christ early in life, others make deathbed confessions. Again in this timing there is none better or worse, but all serve to give glory to God for his grace and mercy.

DISCUSS: Which of these two "temporal" readings do you find more convincing? Why?

But there is another way to read this talk of first and last, and that is *qualitatively*. Here they say Jesus is not referring to time, but rather the quality of the person saved. WE could state it this way: there are bigger and stronger and "more important" people in the kingdom. But only kinda. Because it is all up to God and his grace and mercy, and truly from the top to the bottom, the best to the worst, the first to the last, each and every one is a sinner saved by grace. Therefore though there may be some distinction (some apostles, some prophets, some teachers, etc) ultimately these fall away in the light of who Jesus is and what he has done. So sure, the first shall be last, the last first because we are all the same in Christ Jesus.

DISCUSS: DO you prefer this type of reading of this parable? Why or why not?

But I would like to end by saying this: I really don't think that it matters all that much which camp you fall in. Because the heart of the Gospel in this parable stays the same, which is this: All of salvation, from its timing to the life of the believer afterwards is in the hands of a gracious God. The call to follow Christ, regardless of the timing in the world, or in your life, and the heights or possible suffering that you are called to is all done by God. Therefore there is no room for grumbling, or begrudging or really anything but praise and worship to the God who so graciously saves us!

DISCUSS: Why is it so important that we understand salvation first as a work of God? What practical difference does this make in our lives?