

"The First Will Be Last And The Last Will Be First"

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[0:00] Would you open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 19? Hannah, thank you.

Maybe you've heard this before. That's so wrong. Unfair. How can they treat me like that? Grumble, grumble. You know what, honey? We deserve way better than this life group. Grumble, grumble. You know what?

If this church would just realize what we have been contributing sacrificially over the last months and years, you know what? A little recognition would go a long way.

Grumble, grumble. I expect to be treated in a little different way than that. Grumble, grumble. To grumble.

[1:05] Webster says it's to mutter in discontent. Grumble, grumble. When something happens to you that you perceive as some kind of injustice, you're tempted to grumble.

Grumble. When you don't get something you want, you may be tempted to grumble. Grumbling is almost always born of comparing yourself to others.

And so at the heart of grumbling is this sense of you. Me. My rights. What's due me?

You know, cancer can metastasize in a body. And it can wreak havoc in a body.

Grumbling is the metastasizing of pride in a body. And it can do a local body great harm. God has no place.

[2:16] There's no place for grumbling in his people. But you know what is fitting among God's people? Gratitude. Humble gratitude that is in constant amazement at God's grace.

And so this morning, the sermon of this title, if I were to rewrite it, it would be God's grace for your grumbling heart. We're going to move through quite a section of scripture this morning.

And I want you to see first a stark contrast. And then Jesus is going to make some sobering clarifications. And then we're going to end in a parable of God's grace.

And what I want to help you to see this morning, and what I believe God is wanting to address us with this morning, is that God's grace compels us to say no to grumbling and to say yes to gratitude.

And so what I'm going to do is I'm just going to walk us through a lengthy chunk of scripture here, but we're just going to move quickly through it and make points along the way.

[3:32] So I hope you're looking at Matthew chapter 19. If you would be looking at verses 13, we're going to start with a stark contrast between two different kinds of hearts, a humble heart and a prideful heart.

And so in verses, chapter 19, verses 13 through 15, Jesus gives us a lesson on a humble heart. Here's what's going on. In verse 13, we have parents bringing their kids to Jesus.

And if you look at verse 13, at the end, the disciples are rebuking these parents. They're saying something like this. Sorry, Jeremiah's real cute, but the master doesn't have any time for your little babies, okay?

He's got time for big image bearers, not little image bearers. And Jesus hears them, and he says to them, let the little children come to me and do not hinder them.

You see that in verse 14? Why not? For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. A couple weeks ago, Billy preached a great sermon out of Matthew chapter 18, verses 3 and 4.

[4:44] And if you just page one back and look at Matthew 18, 3 through 4, Jesus is bringing something to our minds. And Matthew, who's organizing all this, is setting up a comparison.

And in Matthew 18, 2, 3 and 4, we read, Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you disciples will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. So the kingdom of heaven values humility. And so Jesus is saying, hey, you guys, would you stop keeping the little children from coming to me?

Let them come to me, because they are a living parable of a kingdom value. Humility. They're dependent. They're devoted.

Unassuming. Trusting. Jesus is saying, don't stop these children from coming to me.

[5:51] They picture something such as them. The kingdom of heaven throws wide open its doors of grace to the humble.

Wide open. And so what we see happening in verses 13 through 15 is that Matthew is emphasizing childlike humility. It is a distinctive trait that characterizes a follower of Jesus.

Humility. And it's not the first time that Jesus has talked about this. Back in Matthew chapter 5, the Sermon of the Mount, the Beatitudes, remember, blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the mourned.

Blessed are those who are meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. These are all different ways of talking about humility. Disciples are those who are God-reliant, not self-reliant.

We come low to our God. We come recognizing our need to our God like children. So as followers of Jesus, we are dependent on God's grace, not our own ability.

[7:09] So what we see happening at the end of verse 15 is that after Jesus does this rebuke of his disciples, the children come to him and you see what he does? He puts his hands on them.

He prays for them and he blesses them. So here's what I want to get into your heads right out of the gate. Here's what Matthew is saying. The kingdom emphasizes humility.

God delights in humility. So much though, that Jesus moves towards the humble. God in his grace moves towards the humble. He lays his hands on the humble.

He moves towards the humble. Humility and grace, when they intersect, there's an explosion of gratitude.

Where humility and grace intersect, you've got gratitude. So this comparison, this contrast starts up with childlike humility humility.

[8:09] And then, in contrast, in walks a living parable of pride. And this is in verses 16 through 22, the other side of the contrast.

A young man comes in. Here's what happened. This guy walks in, comes up to Jesus, he asks a question, he and Jesus have a dialogue, and then he walks away sad.

So let's see what happens here. In verse 16, a man walks up, according to Jesus, and what we learn later is that he's a young man, and he's a rich man.

Luke tells us he is a ruler, he's a powerful man, and apparently he's a polite guy, because he's very nice in addressing Jesus. He might be the kind of guy, dad's, he might say, hmm, kind of guy I like for my daughter.

So this young man comes up to Jesus in verse 16, and he says, teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life? And all of a sudden, Jesus is smelling something. Have you ever opened up your refrigerator, and you see in the back a bottle of milk, and you're like thinking, oh man, when did we get that?

[9:22] What will you do? You do the sniff test. You pull it out, you open it up, and you just go, and what are you smelling for? Sour milk.

And as soon as you know it's sour milk, especially if you smell sour milk, you're like, this is out. This man's question has the smell of sour pride in the nostrils of Jesus.

Jesus smells something here. What this guy is saying is, what good deed must I do to have eternal life? This man thinks that he is capable of gooding himself into eternal life.

That's what's behind the question. It's stinking thinking. So Jesus picks up on the word good and attempts to steer this man to God in verse 17.

Do you see him do it? Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. And who is that? That's God. In other words, you ain't good, man. Only God is good.

[10:34] Why do you think you can do good when you're a sinner? And then in verse 17, Jesus says, if you would enter life, if you would get saved, you want to be saved?

Here. Keep the commandments. Now I'm guessing some of you right now are like, I'm smelling something sour myself. Hmm. Is Jesus teaching us salvation by works right here?

Hmm. Is he actually saying that obey the commands and you will be saved? Is that what Jesus is saying? Well, he's not saying that. Here's how we know. This is just the beginning of Jesus' response to this rich young man.

Jesus is starting to probe this young man. Let's wait for the rest of what Jesus says. You'll see what he does. Jesus puts on a bit of a clinic here. Now, depending on how this man responds to this will be very telling.

For example, Jesus says, keep the commandments. And if this young man said, you know what? Oh, last week, I was just trying to, you know, not murder. And then I realized I hate people in my heart.

[11:46] And I realized there's just no way I can keep this one commandment. I am, I can't do it, Jesus. I can't keep the commandments. Now, if he said that to Jesus right now, Jesus would be like, we're cooking with gas.

You're talking to the right guy. But look how he responds in verse 18. Keep the commandments. Oh yeah, which ones? There's a little sour smell to that.

A little sour pride to that. Which ones? Not quite the humble response. And then Jesus says in verse 19 some very interesting thing. He points them right to the Bible.

He points them right to the latter half of the Ten Commandments of interrelationships. Okay? And so now, here's what I would do if I was a cinematographer. If I was putting this, this little section into a movie, here's how I'd do it.

I'd have a kind of close-up lens on Jesus when Jesus would say, well, you shall not murder. He says that. And then I would, I would go over with my lens to the rich young man who would then say, never.

[12:49] I go back to Jesus who then says, you shall not commit adultery. And that camera would go back to the rich young ruler who would be like, I didn't even think about that. Heaven forbid.

Back to Jesus. And Jesus says, you shall not steal. To the young man and the young man says, not even once, not even a toothpick. Back to Jesus. Jesus says, you shall not bear false witness.

It goes to the rich young man. He says, I'm not a crook. Back to Jesus. And Jesus says, honor your father and your mother. To the young man, I rise up in the gate and call my mother blessed.

Back to Jesus. Jesus says, love your neighbor as yourself. The young man says, master, I walked old lady Ruth, the widow, across the street, coming to here. I love my neighbor.

This guy's like Teflon. Nothing sticks. He says, all these I have kept. What do I still lack? Are you smelling it?

[13:45] He's talking to Emmanuel. God incarnate. The one who came to save his people from their sins by dying for them on a cross.

He's got a problem. What do I lack? Jesus would have been fine if Jesus said, humility. But Jesus doesn't.

Look what he does. He's not done. He's just setting this guy up. He has him right where he wants. Just a bigger principle. The law brings us to Jesus.

The law exposes our sinfulness and shows us our need for Christ. Jesus fulfills the law. So look where he goes.

Jesus you want to be perfect? George 21 you want to be perfect? You want to be complete?

[14:47] What he's saying is this is the Shema Deuteronomy 6 you want to love God with everything you got? You want to be like that? Rich wrong man says oh yes yes I do as a matter of fact yes that's why I'm here.

Jesus says go. Oh I can go. Yes I can go. And sell. Oh I can sell. What do you want me to sell? All that you got. Excuse me.

Not only sell all that you have and then give to the poor. Go on eBay sell all of your stuff when it comes into PayPal take all the cash and give it to the poor.

Jesus is exposing the true God of this young man. wealth. Riches. Possessions. Jesus isn't done. Remember in Matthew 16 Jesus is talking about being a follower of him and to be a follower if anyone would come after me he must deny himself take up his cross and follow me.

[16:01] That's what he's doing right here with this rich young man. Deny yourself. Deny the God you're worshipping so that you can follow me.

He's calling him to repent. Jesus doesn't swoon at the feet of this rich powerful young man. He calls him to repent.

He sees through him. and so he says hey you want to follow me repent of your false God of money give it all away and then come after me.

And then in verse 22 as soon as he hears it he goes away sorrowful for as Matthew says he had great possessions. Remember when this is part of a contrast remember the humble of heart they come to Jesus and Jesus moves towards them he puts his hands on them he pours out his grace on them what does this guy do?

Jesus says come follow me he goes the other way. Verse 22 when the young man heard he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.

[17:20] Here's what that all means he would not follow Jesus because he was unwilling to give up his stuff.

So he goes away sorrowful which is very ironic because I thought that money is supposed to make you happy. No.

Do you remember the rich young man's original question? What good deed must I do to have eternal life? Jesus' answer about keeping the commandments was just the beginning.

He was exposing this man's sinfulness. He was exposing the false god he worshipped in order for this man to have eternal life meant that he had to deny himself and follow Jesus. The answer to the question what must I do to inherit eternal life is come follow me.

Jesus is the source of eternal life. So here we have in this first section a contrast between the humility of a child and the pride of a young man.

[18:30] One this humility of the child Jesus welcomes. The pride of the young man he walks away. God opposes the proud because the proud oppose him and he gives grace to the humble because the humble come to him.

so here we have a contrast humble or prideful and it's all a part of this section that's going to get summarized in a parable.

the disciples are watching all this happen. And so in verse 19 Jesus makes a major clarification.

So we've looked at the contrast let's look at the clarification starting in verse 23. Now there are two clarifications in this passage and you can see them with the word truly in verse 23 and verse 28.

Let's look at the first clarification on riches. Jesus says truly I say to you only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.

[19:40] He's talking to his disciples with difficulty it's only with difficulty a rich person will enter the kingdom of heaven. And a little bit background of this culture at this time it was believed that wealth and possessions were seen as signs of God's blessing on your life.

It was kind of a first century kind of prosperity gospel of sorts. It's like hey man you're loaded. Oh man God favors on you. We see it showing up nowadays and it's like oh you've got a church of 9,000 people.

God's blessing you. Oh you've got a church of 14 people. Here's a book. What Jesus is going to get right here is that wealth is no reliable indicator of God's favor.

In fact wealth is a liability to get into the kingdom. So verse 23 truly I say to you it's like Jesus said hey let me clarify something for you my disciples only with difficulty can a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven and they're like what are you talking about?

it's counter cultural it's not a sign of God's favor it's a liability to entering the kingdom here's why wealth possessions riches they can become a God unto themselves it's what someone can live for it's it's what someone can say oh the love of money I want to love money with all my heart soul mind and strength there are some serious warnings about the love of money in our Bibles 1st Timothy 6 6 the love of money is the root of all evil but you remember this one from Matthew 6 Jesus says you cannot serve both God and money it's one or the other only one thing can control your heart what controls your heart controls your life and what controls your life conforms you to it

and in verse 24 Jesus makes a rather ridiculous comparison it's crazy now if you're sitting in here [22:00] I'm like oh well man I'm glad I'm not wealthy I'm glad I'm not rich man this guy next to me is rich I'm glad I hope he's hearing it well let me ask you this are you worried about next month's house payment oh you're not are you worried about groceries next week no transportation all set up you got health insurance is that taken care of according to the world you are like part of the two percent of the wealthy this is a sober warning for anyone so we're left questioning how difficult is it for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven how difficult Jesus and then he gives us this this really ridiculous example look at verse 24 again I tell you it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God so here's the comparison as far as entering things goes a camel which is a thousand pound dromedary from the

Middle East it's easier from that thousand pound beast to get into maybe one eighth of an inch hole in a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom and you know what you're left saying well that's impossible well this week I've been thinking about that it's not impossible for a thousand pound dromedary to get into an eye of a needle here's all you need to do we have a ninja liquefier at our house you could liquefy a camel and have a funnel into an eye of a needle and spend four years dripping it in that's the only way it's impossible Jesus is not he's making a statement so this understanding that there is this eye of the needle gate in the wall of Jerusalem and only a camel needs to bow down and you take everything off that's an attempted explanation there's no eye of the needle gate in the wall of Jerusalem Jesus is saying it's impossible and the disciples get it look at verse 25 when the disciples heard this they were greatly astonished that's shocked flabbergasted what who then can be saved if the rich folks can't get in who can that's exactly where Jesus wants them because it's not only wealth that will keep you out of the kingdom it's any idol anything that you worship above

God it's impossible who can be saved nobody can be saved no one has the ability to save themselves no one in verse 26 Jesus then says something that is incredibly incredibly important we first read but Jesus looked at them and that would have been his divine x-ray vision into the souls of his disciples they would have been like and he says to them with man this is impossible that anyone would be saved but with God all things are possible with man salvation is impossible man man can't save himself only God by his impossible grace is able to save sinners there is only one who is good there is only one who can save and so what we see

Jesus saying here is what's impossible for you is impossible for God his grace alone saves and what we know as Christians is this what Jesus did on the cross on Calvary that made the impossible possible his grace his power on display on the cross that makes our salvation possible there is no other way so here Jesus clarifies wealth is not a sign of God's favor but actually it's a major liability it can keep you out of the kingdom everyone's sin keeps them out of the kingdom if it's not loving wealth maybe it's loving sex maybe it's loving power maybe it's loving what other people think about you that'll keep you out because you're elevating it above God only God can save grace and grace alone the second clarification shows up in verse 28 but it's it's a response to Peter verse 27 then Peter said in reply see we have left everything and follow you what then will we have hey the rich dude he walked away but Jesus remember on the beach he asked me to follow you I dropped my nets my livelihood and I've been following you for two and a half years what about us what does this mean what will we have future what will we have what's in it for us and Jesus response is to clarify what's coming in the future a future grace a future inheritance God's grace saves us and God's grace awaits us he says truly I say to you in the new world let me clarify you in the new world and what he's talking about there in verse 28 I think truly I say to you in the new world he's talking about when Jesus comes back and the whole heavens and the earth are made new again sin the curse is gone on that day when he makes all things new he sits on his glorious throne he's reigning on high the kingdom has been consummated in full on that day when that happens you will receive your future grace you will receive your inheritance notice he calls himself the son of man when the new earth when

[28:44] I sit on my glorious throne the son of man Daniel 7 he's given all authority dominion over all nations at that time at that time you

will receive your future inheritance Jesus says nowhere of when just it's out there it's undefined gap between his first coming and his second coming we don't know when he's coming back but the inheritance is there he then clarifies the inheritance itself he says to his disciples in verse 28 on that day new earth I'm on my throne you who have followed me will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel now this isn't the easiest thing to explain so here's what we know for sure when Jesus comes back and there's a new heavens and new earth and he's sitting on his throne his disciples are going to play a prominent role in establishing the new kingdom consummated kingdom it's a position of prominence and he's speaking of it as inheritance it's coming

Jesus recognizes that for those of us who follow after him who deny ourselves take up our cross follow him he's saying I've got you there's future grace that awaits my grace that saves you there's more grace waiting in verse 29 he broadens the scope he says and everyone who has left houses everyone would include us everyone everyone who follow after Jesus everyone who's left houses your greatest possession everyone who leaves brothers and sisters father mother or children your most precious relationships everyone who leaves them who leaves your lands potential inheritance from your parents everyone who leaves those things for my name's sake to follow me will receive a hundred fold and will inherit eternal life you notice the future will receive will inherit it's waiting it's coming

Jesus understands that we give up our homes and we give up relationships and we give up possible future inheritance to follow him we get cut out of wills because we're followers of Jesus and Jesus says you're in my will Jesus is directing Peter's gaze to the future return and reign when he's on his throne I'll take care of you in verse 30 we read this but many who are first will be last and the last first and I don't know about you you read that and you're like is Jesus speaking in code right now I don't know what he's saying and it seems out of place doesn't it he's just talking about future what's this mean the last will be first and the first will be last well what he's doing is he's getting his disciples ready for what's to come he's preparing his disciples for the hard work of the kingdom and he knows that when you have people working together there's the very likelihood of comparing to one another and grumbling he knows there's going to be some time before he comes back and sits on his glorious throne and he wants to focus his followers on his grace the grace that saves us is the grace that awaits us and so

Jesus sets out a parable now the parable is in chapter 20 verses 1 through 16 and it's there to explain what he says in verse 30 look at verse 30 again by many who are first will be last and the last first now look at chapter 20 verse 16 so the last will be first and the first will be last so it bookends there are these bookends of first and last language surrounding this parable the parable explains what Jesus means so what does he say in the parable well let's look for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house so the kingdom of heaven the saving reign of God is like a master of a house who's going to hire a bunch of people throughout the day and then pay them at the end of the day it's interesting everybody would go out early in the morning 6 a.m. to the center of the village where day laborers would gather to go work in people's vineyards and farms all the way around at 6 a.m.

[34:13] the master of the house hires his first group of day laborers to put in a full day a 12 hour work day in his vineyard and if you look at verse 2 Jesus tells this 3 the master of the house comes back at the third hour at 9 a.m.

and he comes back and hires more day laborers who are just idly standing by because nobody's hired them and he says in verse 4 go into my vineyard and then he talks about some wages I'll make sure you get what you do in verse 5 at the 6 hour he comes back does the 9th hour he comes back and he again hires more people and says go to my vineyard the master of the house keeps on coming back and hiring day laborers for the work he has apparently the harvest he has is plentiful and the workers are few at the 11th hour which is 5 p.m.

which means there's only one more hour in the work day the master of the house returns once again to the marketplace find some other laborers standing there and he says why are you standing there and say no one's hired us and he says go to the vineyard they don't talk about wages just put an hour in verse 8 when quitting time rolls around the master of the house tells his foreman to call

all the laborers that he is personally hired and sent to his vineyard he said bring them together pay them their wages and then things get interesting look and he says pay them their wages beginning with the last up to the first that's interesting last and first language the last are to be hired the last to be hired are to be paid first and the first to be hired are paid last we're reaching a climax of the parable in verse nine here's the surprise those hired last just an hour earlier each of them receives a denarius each of them receives pay for a full day's work now that's unusual the last received the same pay as the first we've got a generous master of house and then in verse 10 the paying of the wages skips to those hired first you see that word first of course if you were one of these laborers you're like thinking oh man man look how generous he is with those guys man

I might be able to get you know my Xbox finally we're going to get some kind of bonus but surprise what happens they get a denarius the first are treated like the last and then in verse 11 these who are hired first they do what the rest of us are do grumble it's the opposite of gratitude and so look what they do in verse 11 and on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house saying these last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat that's not fair grumble grumble they're saying hey master of the house you're treating the last guys like us the first guys they just worked an hour we worked all day we dug for 12 hours in the scorching heat and you're treating them like us paying them what you're going to pay us they see in the parable master of the house raising those hired last to be equals to those who were working from the first and then in verse 12 the master of the house says friend

I am doing you no wrong it's singular it's like focusing on one person and he says friend I'm not doing you any wrong did you not agree with me for denarius did we not agree on this take what belongs to you and go hey case close buddy it's legal we did it right and then he says in verse 12 I chose I chose to give this last worker as I give to you the first notice the emphasis on choice it's his prerogative it's the prerogative the master of the house to give what he wants to be generous with who he wants to be generous to in verse 15 am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me or do you begrudge me my generosity literally goodness there's only one who is good you have no right to take an offense here's what

[39:49] Jesus is doing he's using this parable to show his disciples who are being aimed at the future he's saying don't grumble with one another in the vineyard don't grumble with one another when you're doing kingdom work don't grumble with one another when you're waiting on me do you know why because you're all recipients of my grace all of these workers receive the same generosity from the master of the house and so the point of the parable is grace the master of the house showing grace upon grace upon grace of being showing unmerited favor to those who didn't deserve it so the point of the parable is the last will be first and the first will be last regardless of when you come to Christ regardless of when you're hired we're all recipients of the same grace the grace that saves us is the grace that awaits us grace is the great equalizer of disciples and so what this parable represents the master of the house is

Jesus his vineyard is the work of the kingdom the labors are his disciples and the end of the day is judgment there's no room for grumbling in the kingdom God's grace pushes out grumbling those with humble hearts who experience the impossible made possible by God's grace who are amazed with God's grace they don't point fingers I've been trying to help you see that grumbling is the outworking of some perceived injustice you see it in the parable thinking you deserve more than you're given at the heart of grumbling is selfish pride you don't get what you think or you're treated unjustly so you grumble and it's a cancer to the church gratitude is the outworking of a profound sense of humility of unworthiness it's what happens when poverty of spirit meets God's grace here's how it works out the humble say things like this that

Jesus would call me to follow him why would he by his grace pursue me why would he bother with me I'm not worthy of him I rebelled against him I mocked him I denied him I made fun of people who followed him why would he want me if he's coming at the 11th hour to hire me on to his team sign me up gratitude is the healthy attitude of a humble heart saved by grace and it pushes out grumbling so we see Jesus using this parable to make the point to his disciples hey as after I leave and as you're working in the vineyard there's no room for comparison there's no room for pride there's no room for grumbling there's plenty of room for gratitude there's plenty of room for rejoicing

in the king of grace and having other people experience the same grace this morning we've looked at a contrast between the humble and the prideful and we also saw Jesus clarify what God alone is able to do his grace is able to do the impossible and there's a future grace that awaits and here in this parable he shows us that grace is the great equalizer of the followers of Jesus so the next time you find yourself tempted to grumble here think about these four truths this one you're grumbling against this other co-laborer in the kingdom you were saved by the same grace the same blood that bought you bought him or her and you await second the same future grace and by the way it's way better than a denarius hundred times eternal life third you labor in the same vineyard now we're working together so that others would experience the amazing grace of God and finally when you're tempted to grumble remember that this co-laborer this brother sister in Christ the two of you serve the same master the king of grace I hope this is all good news for a grumbling heart God's grace demonstrated in the cross that awaits us in the new world it transforms grumbling into gratitude let's pray together God in heaven we thank you so much for this extended passage and we thank you so much Jesus for how you interacted with people and how you taught and how you clarified in this parable that you gave Lord Jesus help us to rejoice in the grace you poured out on each of us and may that humble posture towards what you've done God may it bring health to our body God would you make us a grateful people and [45:55] God would you help us to say no to grumbling in light of your amazing grace in Jesus name amen fee to to cut him to him to love him or him to bring back in young man is to raise him his name what he all he said hey