

The last will be first, and the first last

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[0 : 00] Our reading this morning is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 19, verse 23, to chapter 20, verse 19. And Jesus said to his disciples, Truly I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.

Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, Who then can be saved?

But Jesus looked at them and said, With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Then Peter said in reply, See, we have left everything and followed you.

What then will we have? Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, You who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

[1 : 14] But many who are first will be last, and the last first. For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard.

After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And to them he said, You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right, I will give you.

So they went. And going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, Why do you stand here idle all day?

They said to him, Because no one has hired us. He said to them, You go into the vineyard too. And when evening came, The owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, Call the labourers and pay them their wages, Beginning with the last up to the first.

And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, Each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, They thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarius.

[2 : 24] 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.

But he replied to one of them, Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.

Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? So the last will be first, And the first last. And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside, And on the way he said to them, See, we are going up to Jerusalem, And the Son of Man will be delivered over To the chief priests and scribes, And they will condemn him to death, And deliver him over to the Gentiles To be mocked and flogged and crucified, And he will be raised on the third day.

Hear the word of the Lord. Well, good morning, everyone.

Good to see you. Hope, I hope. It will be good to chat to you after. Welcome if you're visiting. My name is Dave. I'm the pastor here. Would you please join me in prayer As we come to God's word.

[3 : 58] Father, as we just sang, I pray that your word would Compliment that song And fill our hearts with joy That you have saved our soul And that it's all of you, All of your grace.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, what does this parable mean? You've got all these workers, And some come in at the 11th hour.

Is it encouraging people to leave Their coming to Jesus Until the 11th hour of their life? Like, you can just put off Becoming a Christian And say a prayer on your deathbed, And it'll be right.

Is it saying it's not the amount of work You do for God, But it's your willingness, Your willingness to serve God That's all important.

Is that what it's about? Is it a bit bigger picture than that? Is it about the nations, The Gentiles coming into God's kingdom As last compared to the Jews Who were first?

[5 : 08] Is that what it's about? Is it saying all people are equal before God? Is it saying all servants Will get the same reward In God's kingdom?

Is it warning against begrudging someone Becoming a Christian later in life When you've spent your whole life In the church serving? And what is this parable about?

There's a danger with parables, I think. We can almost see whatever we want. There's a bit of a danger with parables.

Or we can be a bit confused by them, I think. And the very first half reasonable thought we have, I think we can latch on to it. That makes sense.

And so we stick with that. We need to spend just a few minutes Thinking about and understanding How these story parables work If we're going to hear God's word to us today.

[6 : 13] In church history, it was really common To interpret these stories as allegories. Every detail in the story has some spiritual reality. So if we take the most famous parable Of the Good Samaritan You know the story, I'm sure But a man is beaten up on the side of the road Now one church father says The robbers in that story were the devil and his angels They stripped him of his immortality They beat him by persuading him to sin The donkey, I don't get this one But the donkey is the flesh of Christ's incarnation I'm still thinking that one through The inn where he is taking care of is the church And the next day is the resurrection And the innkeeper is the apostle Paul Now this is a very well respected church father But which of the details are we meant to find meaning in

And which do we kind of just overlook It feels a bit arbitrary Or you've got to find an obscure answer If you're going to get every detail to mean something You've got to come up with some pretty obscure answers My other problem with it Is how do you know your interpretation is correct?

How do you know the innkeeper is Paul? How can we be confident that's what God is telling us? I think we can avoid all this guesswork If we hear these parables in their context And if we understand how this genre of parables work So there was a pedestrian Injured in a hit and run incident And he was a rough looking, biker looking man Covered in tattoos, head to toe Piercings all over Blood trickling down his face He was kind of going in and out of consciousness After being hit by this car Now the first car to go past after that Driving in that car was the archbishop The Anglican archbishop But he noticed the man He slowed down

But he was wearing God's holy vestments And he didn't want the blood to get on God's holy vestments So he kept driving And then in the next car Dave Bott, a local pastor Was driving by And he saw the man But he was running late for a church meeting To do God's work And he decided that was He had to keep driving But then in the next car was a Muslim man He was on his way to his evening prayers At the mosque And he pulled over And he called an ambulance He paid the \$415 ambulance fee Because he didn't have insurance And he used his turban to bind up his wounds And then he went with the man to the hospital To make sure he was cared for Which of these men loved his neighbour?

Do you feel like You can disagree on the details I don't really mind Do you feel the punch of the parable? They're meant to kind of get under our skin a bit They're meant to challenge our assumptions About God and ourselves and the kingdom Parables Led the first century hearers They were familiar with the details And we've got to do a bit of work there To understand those details But they led them Jesus told them in such a way That led them along And then there's this shocking twist And it's like Ooh It challenges your expectations So I think that's how the genre works So as a good rule of thumb Look for one point One main punch From a parable And let the context be our guide

[10 : 43] If I can get a bit of audience participation At this point What was the question asked Before the story of the Good Samaritan?

Does anyone remember? What question is asked? Who is my neighbour? It's the expert in the law Asking who is my neighbour? That sets the context Well, true love Crosses Racial Social Any prejudice Even love for enemies Whoever you think your enemies are The context Gives us guidance What about the parable A few weeks ago The unforgiving servant Do you remember Anyone remember the question Peter asks?

How many times Do I have to forgive my brother Who sins against Let the context Be the guide For the punch Of the parable We don't need to work out In that parable What 100 denarii Represents We all feel the punch When The master forgives a debt Had no chance of repaying And then For a sum of Like \$50 He goes and Tries to Get revenge We all know that feeling When God has forgiven us So much How can we have that attitude Toward one another?

Dare I say Allegorising Distracts From the punch Of the parable So here too In chapter 20 Let's Let the context Be our guide And We've got to let This parable Get under our skin So what is The context?

Well that's why I thought it would be worth Well the elders actually Thought it would be worth Reading a bit more Of Back into the passage We looked at last week Just to refresh Our memory Here The chapter division At this point Moving into chapter 20 Is really unhelpful Now that's a man-made invention The chapter headings You've got that word For Jesus is still speaking To Peter There's no change In audience There's no change In scene Here's the basis Of what Jesus has just Said to Peter In verse 30 Many who are first Will be last And the last First Jesus concludes The parable And This should Guide us In our interpretation With that same Proverb Just the other way Around In verse 16 The last Will be first And the first Last We should be

[13 : 43] Expecting A reversal A reversal Of our Expectations He's answering Peter's question In verse 27 See See We have left Everything And followed you What then Will we have It's really hard To know What's motivating Peter In that question Like is it Is it fear We've left Everything Has that been Enough Is it pride We have left Everything Is it self Pity It's hard To know But what is Clear is that Peter's focus Is on what He and the Other disciples Have sacrificed See Jesus Look at the

Cost We've made For you The focus Is on them This parable Is challenging A wrong Understanding Of what it Means to Follow Jesus It challenges Peter's focus On his Sacrifice I think it Challenges Our focus On what The service We offer To God The costs We make And what We deserve So getting Into it Then Verse One And two For the Kingdom of Heaven Is like A master Of a House Who went Out early In the Morning To hire Labourers For his Vineyard And after Agreeing With the Labourers For a Denarius A day He sent Them Into His Vineyard Now This This I understand Is a Very Typical Scene In the First Century If Casual Workers Were Needed You Go To The Market Place And If

Anyone Wants Work For the Day They Go To The Market Place To Be Hired They Go At Dawn A Denarius Is A Day's Wage This Is A Very Fair Agreement!

8am To Get More Workers And Then 12 And 3 And 5 We're Not Told That's Not The Focus All We Know Is That The Other Workers Rely On His Integrity I'll Pay You Whatever Is Right He's Fair I'll Pay You Whatever Is Right He Even Comes Back After Coming At 6am Then 9am Then Midday Then 3pm He Even Comes With Just An Hour Left Of Daylight 5pm So Verses 6 And 7 He Said To Those Why Do You Stand Here Idle All Day They Said To Him Because No One Has Hired Us And He Said To Them You Go Into The Vineyard Too These Last Workers Are They Less Trustworthy Why

Aren't They Hired Are They Less Productive Other People Have Overlooked Them Going Don't Want Them Again We're Not Really Told But What We Do See Here Is Just With An Hour Left He Freely Chooses To Hire Them Now Verses 8 to 12 And When Evening Came The Owner Of The Vineyard Said To His Foreman Call The Labourers And Pay Them Their Wages Beginning With The Last Up To The First And When Those Hired About The Eleventh hour Came Each Of Them Received A Denarius Now When Those Hired First Came They Thought They Would Receive More But Each!

[17 : 48] Of Them Also! Received A Denarius 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 How Is That Fair Where They're Just Covered In Sweat And Exhausted And These Guys In The Cool Of The Day Do An Hour!

Maybe Max And They Get The Same Amount How Is That Fair These Workers Are Really Focused On What They've Had To Endure And They're Comparing Themselves To Others They Deserve More I Think They're Meant To Sound Like Peter's Focus Look What We Have Endured What We Have Left For You What We Deserve Do You See This Master In This Story As Short Changing Those Who Worked Hard Do You Feel The Unfairness Or Do You See This Master As Incredibly Generous Verse 13

To 16 Friends I'm Doing You No Wrong Did You Not Agree With Me For A Denarius Take What Belongs To You And Go I Choose To Give To This Last Work As I Give To You Am I Not Allowed To Do What I Choose With What Belongs To Me Or Do You Begrudge My Generosity They Have No Right To Feel Hard Done By They Agreed For A Day's Wage He's Been Fair He Didn't Pay Them Half A Day He Was Fair He Met The Agreement He Paid What Was Right They Are Comparing Themselves To The Others And Feeling Jealousy Contempt Because They're Focused On What They've Done What They've Endured In Comparison To Them But

Here's The Thing Generosity Can't Be Earned You Can't Earn Generosity It's A Contradiction In Terms This Master Is Totally Free From Any External Obligation Am I Not Allowed To Do What I Choose With What Belongs To Me It's Not That This Master Is Unfair He Can Do What He Wants He Is Free To Give Because It all Belongs To Him The Kingdom The Kingdom Of Heaven Doesn't Operate On Merit At All Is The Point Of This Parable God's Gifts Of Salvation!

God's Blessings! God's Rewards! Are All His Free Gift! It's They're His!

[21 : 23] They belong To Him! The Christian Life Is All God's Free Generosity All He's Free To Give It To Whoever He Chooses He's Gracious To Whomever He Wills All Of It I Think Whether We See That Or Not Whether We Appreciate That Or Not Depends On Whose Sacrifice We're Focused On Well That's My Experience In My Own Heart At Least Are We Focused On Your Sacrifice Or His I Think This Parable Was Even Framed It's Bracketed With Peter's Focus On His Sacrifice And Then We Come To Jesus Sacrifice We Heard Last Week That It Is Impossible To Enter The Kingdom Of Heaven With

Man This Is Impossible The Kingdom Of Heaven I Like Martin's Phrase It's Not For Decent People It's For Perfect People Who Share The Character Of God It Is Impossible To To To Serve Enough To Sacrifice It's Impossible We've Got To Come As Utterly Dependent Children Peter Is Saying See See Lord What We've Done For You And Then Chapter 20 Verse 18 Jesus Says!

See! See! We Are Going Up To Jerusalem And The Son Of Man That Figure Is In Daniel All Authority In Heaven On Earth He Is The First The Son Of Man Will Be Delivered Over To The Chief Priests And Scribes And They Will Condemn Him To Death And Deliver Him Over To The Gentiles To Be Mocked And Flogged And Crucified And He Will Be Raised On The Third!

Day See That Don't Don't Focus On What You've Given Up For God Look What God Has Given Up For You The Christian Life Is All God's Generous Grace He Is Free In Giving It Am I Not Allowed To Do What I Choose With What Belongs To Me I Want To Focus On Three Implications If Jesus Kingdom If None Of It Operates Off Merit If It's Only Generosity I Want To I Think There's Lots Of Implications Of That But I Want To Focus On Three Things He Is Free To Give Eternal Life To Who He Will Even At Last Grumbling

Grumbling Is An Ugly Sin What We Should Be Saying In All Our Christian Service And Sacrifice Is I Never Made!

[24 : 48] A Sacrifice So Can We Go Through These He Is Free To Give Eternal Life To The Very Last There's A Guy Listened To An Interview Of Michael Franz Franzese I Hope I Said That Right Michael Franzese He Was High Up In The Mafia In New York In The 80s A Violent Life As You Could Imagine Some Of The Deeds He's Done I Don't Want To Imagine He Said One Of The Horrors Of That Life Is If You Make A Mistake Your Best Friend Walks You Into A Room And You Don't Walk Out Again At One Stage He Had A Scheme That He Was Stealing 8 Million And That Was Back In The 80s 8 Million!

A Week Not Bad Now And the prison guard saw that he wasn't looking good.

And he came back and he pushed a Bible through the slot. And he spends that solitary confinement mainly just reading the Bible. He said he started in the book of Proverbs and he's just amazed by the wisdom there.

And then he reads the Gospels and Jesus is this leader. He's obviously impressed by Jesus as we are. And something he pointed out was in Jesus, he doesn't demand loyalty out of fear like his life in the mafia.

Not loyalty out of fear but loyalty out of love. A greater loyalty out of love. And that really got to him.

[27 : 02] There's going to be a great reversal when Jesus comes again to judge. There's going to be decent church going people, maybe in this room, who will be shut out of the kingdom.

And Jesus, who are self-reliant. And friend, I'm doing you no wrong. And mafia bosses are coming in.

There's going to be this reversal. Prostitutes are entering the kingdom ahead. Because it's all generosity, he's free to give grace to whoever he chooses.

Those who seem to be important, even in church circles, if they're self-reliant, there's going to be this great reversal.

Even those who seem less important in society, he's free to welcome unborn children. He's free to welcome the disabled.

[28 : 22] Because it's all his generosity. Isn't that wonderful? I remember the ministry at Crossroads with the mentally disabled that we used to help out with from time to time.

And there was this one guy who just repeatedly asked, like every time we went, You go to the pub? You go to the pub? Do you remember? Darren. Darryl.

Darryl. Good on you. There you go. After a couple of years, he started asking a different question. You go to church? It's like something, I don't know, something seemed to change.

There was this one night where they were singing Amazing Grace. And to be honest with you, it sounded awful. But it melted. I was holding back tears because I'm pretty sure God delights.

The kingdom of God is this reversal. He is free to give to the least. People seem unimportant in society.

[29 : 28] Even mafia bosses. He's free to save whoever he wants. There's going to be a great reversal. This parable isn't encouraging you to wait to your deathbed to come to Christ.

But whatever you've done, it really does give you hope. The kingdom of God is based on his generosity. So come. Second implication, if the Christian life is all his free generosity from first to last, is that grumbling is ugly.

It's an ugly attitude. It's an ugly sin. I fall into grumbling spirit at least on a weekly basis.

Like, you ask Emma, Mondays are really bad for me. Like, Mondays and holidays. Oh, I'm so prone to it. I've done so much.

I deserve that miserable spirit that doubts God's goodness and his fairness. It comes from forgetting that all his blessings come from his free generosity.

[30 : 51] It's this wrong focus on what I've sacrificed, what I deserve. We can be miserable in comparing what God blesses one another with.

That spouse, that child, that child who grows up to love God, that better health. I've done more. I deserve more.

We can be jealous of someone else's ministry gifts and position and successes. But if the kingdom is based on his generosity, he's never shortchanged you.

Never. Everything is just his freeness in giving it. All our talents, all our successes, whatever blessings we've got.

It's his freeness. He's never shortchanged any of us. It's really ugly to think of God that he has. What a focus on his sacrifice, not my sacrifice.

[32 : 13] As Alan's already talked about, we're fundraising for our mission partners. I was going to transfer funds this week, but I paused because I felt like it was coming from a place of compulsion.

Like, I better do it. Like, is God asking us to sacrifice our money? Well, it depends if you focus on what you're giving up for God or if you focus on what he's given up for you and all the blessings that come with that.

It depends where your focus is. David Livingston, he was missionary. He left the comforts of England to be missionary in the mid-1800s. His goal was to explore Africa.

It was unexplored at that point. And his goal was to create access into all the areas of Africa for the sake of the gospel. And he later said in this, later in life at a speech to students in Cambridge, people talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa.

Anxiety, sickness, suffering, danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences, may make us pause, cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink.

[33 : 49] But let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us and for us.

I never made a sacrifice. He's famous for that. I never made a sacrifice. When you compare it to his generosity and the glory that's coming, there was, yes, there was real cost, but I never made a sacrifice.

It's all gain. Peter, leaving his fishing trade to follow Jesus, look what I've left for you. That does not deserve one of the 12 thrones in the age to come.

That is his free generosity that Jesus gives that, promises that. In all our service, whatever cost it is, and some costs are really high.

I'm not trying to downplay that, especially the relational costs. But when we compare it to the surpassing glory he gives us, whatever hard service we're called to, when we compare it to that glory, we're meant to be like that 11th hour worker.

[35 : 16] He goes, I don't deserve. I don't deserve what you gave me. I've never made a sacrifice. I've never made a sacrifice. Let's rejoice that the kingdom of heaven doesn't operate on merit, but only ever on our master's free generosity.

Let's pray. Father, for those of us who haven't grasped just how free your grace is and that your salvation is on offer simply by what you've done, and I pray that the penny would drop through your word.

And I pray for us who have been Christians maybe for many years and our focus has just turned in on ourselves and we've forgotten all you've done for us and all you've purchased for us, that it's all your generosity.

Father, I pray that you would cause our hearts to rejoice in our salvation and your many and the glory you promise. Make our hearts rejoice again so that our service to you would be pleasing and not this murmuring spirit.

Pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.