

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtminc.org Today's Date: June 7, 2020

The First and Last in the Kingdom

by Dan Trygg

“Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ ...²⁷ Then Peter said to Him, ‘Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?’²⁹ ‘...Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.³⁰ But many first-ones will be last; and last-ones, first.’” Matthew 19:24,27,29-30

“These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’¹³ But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?’¹⁴ Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.¹⁵ Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’¹⁶ Thus the last-ones will be first, and the first-ones last.”

Matthew 20:12-16

“In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves being thrown out.²⁹ And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.³⁰ And behold, they are last-ones who will be first, and they are first-ones who will be last.”

Luke 13:28-30

Jesus was a master-teacher. He knew how to tell a story with a punch to it, and *how to turn a phrase to make it memorable*. Often, He told similar stories to bring out similar, but different points. Here is an example of this. In Matthew, both accounts have to do with the kingdom of God, and the *punch lines of each teaching sound similar, yet the order of the component words are exactly opposite*. And, when you look carefully at each of them, and compare them side-by-side, they are not designed to address the same issues, at all, ...at least not directly. **Then, Jesus used the same punch line in another parable in Luke**, which deals with an entirely different matter.

The first example follows Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. The young man is eager to know what *good thing* he could *do* in order that he might come to have inherit eternal life. Jesus tried to redirect him. “Why do you question Me concerning ‘the good’? One is ‘the good’. But if you are desiring to enter into life, keep the commandments.” The young man said, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “You shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and mother; and *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*.” The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept; what thing do I still lack?” (Mark's account specifically adds, “Looking at him, Jesus *loved* him. – 10:21) Jesus said to him, “**If you wish to be complete (mature, brought to fulfillment), go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.**” But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property (Matt. 19:16-22). **This challenge was meant to reveal to the young man that he wasn't fulfilling all the commandments, as he thought. Specifically, he was not fully loving others as himself**, since he was not willing to share what he had with them. **Of course, we do not gain eternal life by our works. The young man had to come to understand that.**

Jesus, however, takes this interaction to point out another reality: **It is very difficult for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of God.** The word for “difficult” here is “distasteful, disagreeable, displeasureable, finding-fault-with and *therefore* difficult”. **Why? Because the kingdom of God is the reign and rule of GOD, and they must allow Him to have first place in everything. If He is to be their King, then He must also be King over all they have and are.** To enter the kingdom of God, they must defer all that they have to Him. This is a difficult thing. **It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom. The disciples were shocked!** The rich and powerful were the ones who could go anywhere, and do anything. They were people of privilege and possibilities that other people could only dream of. Moreover, it was often thought that being rich and powerful was a sign of God's special blessing. And now to hear that these “blessings” may actually be making it more difficult to respond to and yield to the King, ...it was hard to fathom! **“Who then can be saved?”, they asked. Jesus said that this would be impossible for us on our own, but with God all things are possible.**

Then the disciples brought up the fact that they themselves *had made the choice to forsake everything else to follow Him*. This was part of the discipleship call *everyone* must respond to in order to follow Jesus (Matt. 10:37-40; 16:24-26). *Everyone* must choose to deny him or herself, and give over all they have and are, in order to follow Jesus, ...and *they had responded to that call*. **Jesus then said that “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life. But many first-ones will be last; and last-ones, first”** (Matt. 19:29,30). It seems that what

Jesus is saying is that ***the kingdom of God is the great equalizer***. Those who had much must be willing to forsake their *ownership*, and become a *steward*. Those who had little will find God providing freedom and resources that they never had before. They are *also* required to be servants and stewards *at the command of the King*. The “first ones” will become “last ones”, and the “least and the last ones” will be given a royal inheritance: resources both now, and in the age to come. **To enter the reign and rule of the King, the ones who “have” must be willing to “let go”, ...and the ones who “have not” must trust that God’s provision and resources are available through Him and those submitted to Him.**

The second account follows right after this first one. Jesus tells a parable to illustrate the kingdom. It is like a nobleman who went out to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. The first group were hired in the early morning, and agreed to work for a denarius for the day. Other groups were hired at different times throughout the day, agreeing to work for “whatever is right”, since it was no longer a full day. Some were hired at mid-morning, others at noon, others at mid-afternoon, and some even for the last hour. **At the end of the day, the nobleman instructed the foreman to pay the workers, beginning with the last ones first. Each one received a denarius.** The ones who worked the longest heard that those who had only worked an hour received a denarius, so *they anticipated that they would receive more*, since they did more work. When they, too, received a denarius, they grumbled that it wasn’t fair! **The nobleman reminded them that it was the amount they had agreed to. He had not done them wrong. He was just choosing to be generous** with those who had not been able to be hired earlier, so that *they* would have the benefit of a day’s pay. The nobleman challenged their begrudging attitude toward his generosity. **In this case, those who were the last ones will be first, and those who were the first ones were made to be last.**

Again, the kingdom of God is the great equalizer. Any and all of them were happy to be hired, and would have considered the opportunity to earn wages to be great blessing. **No one was unfairly treated**, but **it was the grace of the nobleman that determined to benefit all with a full day’s pay**, even though not all had been able to be hired at the early morning hour. **The kingdom of God is like this. We should rejoice at the grace of God for each person**, no matter how long we have served Him. **In every case, He gives us all we need. That should be enough.**

The third scenario is from Luke 13:22-30. There, Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, and someone in the crowd asked, **“Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?”** Jesus admonished the crowd of Jews present to **strive** (struggle, wrestle) **to enter by the narrow door; for many will seek to enter, and will not be able.** Once the head of the household closes the door, those outside will begin to knock, saying, “Lord, open up for us!” **But He will say, “I don’t know you.”** **This is the critical issue: Do we have a genuine relationship with God?** Then Jesus declared to the crowd, “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when *you see* Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but *you yourselves being cast out*.”²⁹ And they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.³⁰ And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Lk. 13:28-30). **It is clear that Jesus is saying that outsiders, ...people from the gentile nations..., will be getting into the kingdom of God**, but many of the Jewish people (or for our time, “church people”), ...those who everyone thought would be “sons of the kingdom”..., would **not** be given entrance (cf. Matt. 8:5-13).

Again, the kingdom of God is the great equalizer, ...the controverter of natural structures, statuses and expectations. Those who were thought of as being *outsiders*, ...as being “last” as far as having any hope of access to the kingdom..., **will be given access and honor in that day; but those who thought of themselves as being “rightful recipients”, as being “first” in line for access to the kingdom, will be thrust outside, and will be considered “last”.**

The lesson of these three teachings is that **it does not matter who you are, what your background, status or resources has been, we all come into and walk in the kingdom the same way, through the equalizing grace, provision and access to God which He has made available to us in Christ.** Our past or present social or economic standing, ...how long we have known or have been serving Him, ...or what racial or ethnic background we come from..., **NONE OF THESE THINGS bring special treatment or demand special privilege, ...or deny equal acceptance and opportunity.** In fact, we must consciously lay aside ALL OF THESE THINGS that the world, or the worldly mindset, would argue as a means for special treatment. **We are ALL only, forever and for always servants and stewards of our God, ...equally loved, valued and given dignity in God’s kingdom. We are to forsake all else that would compete for our loyalty, availability and readiness to serve Him.** For some of us that means to forsake the lies of privilege, ownership, and self-determination. For others, it is to forsake the lies of prejudice, oppression, repression and denial of possibilities. **For all of us, it is to embrace the freedom of availability to serve Him and love one another, trusting that God will supply His resources for His work done at His direction.** As we radically obey Him, and His kingdom expands, **God will use US to upend the value systems of the world, ...to lift up the last and the least, and to bring low the ones who have been first, so that HE may be all in all.**