



## This Is What Heaven Looks Like

Matthew 19:27 - 20:16

If you have your Bible with you, please turn with me to Matthew 19. We are going to be continuing our study through Matthew's gospel, looking at verse 27 in chapter 19 to verse 16 in Matthew 20. I'm excited to share with you what God has laid upon my heart. **The title of my sermon this morning is "This Is What Heaven Looks Like."** That's not the title I had last Friday morning. I was originally going to look at what this passage tells us about God, about Jesus, and about the kingdom of God. But after realizing all that this passage tells us about the kingdom of God, I decided to end there. Let's just say this could easily have been three sermons, but I'll spare you having to sit through 3 sermons this morning and just preach one.

So, my goal in these next few minutes is simple. I want to help us better understand what Jesus meant when he prayed "May your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." Was he saying that the kingdom of heaven is a reality now, not just a future reality? Was he saying that we, in some sense, can participate in the joys of the heavenly kingdom now?

I think, I hope, that we will see that the answer to both of these questions is yes. This passage has a lot to say about what God is like and what Jesus is like, but I think, more than that, Matthew is allowing us to pass through the wardrobe to see what heaven is like.

As we read these verses together, if you're able, would you stand with me in honor of God's word. Matthew 19:27-20:16:

<sup>27</sup> Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" <sup>28</sup> Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world [or literally, in the new birth], 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 [judging here is likely talking about ruling, similar to when the judges ruled for a time in Israel's past]. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

### **Laborers in the Vineyard**

20 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day [a denarius was a standard day's wage for a laborer], he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> And going out about the third hour [so, that's about 9 am in the morning, assuming a day starts at about 6 am] he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, <sup>4</sup> and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' <sup>5</sup> So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour [noon] and the ninth hour [3 pm], he did the same. <sup>6</sup> And about the eleventh hour [so, at about 5 pm in the afternoon] he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' <sup>7</sup> They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' <sup>8</sup> And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' <sup>9</sup> And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, <sup>12</sup> 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.' <sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity [the Greek word for "begrudge" here is *ophthalmus*, eye, and the sense is something like "Is your eye evil because I am good?" (NKJV); in other words, are you jealous? (NIV)].' <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first last."

Let's pray.

You can be seated.

My grandmother was an amazing woman. I had the privilege of getting to *really* know her toward the end of her life when she and my grandfather moved into a small apartment behind my parent's home. She was married to my grandfather for 76 years. And she, like my grandfather, grew up in the Depression Era, which meant that she

never threw anything away. I remember getting cards from her while I was away at seminary that had ketchup and salt packets and decorative napkins in them because she didn't want to throw them away. I also remember finding dollar bills around the house in the most random places—in a book on the shelf, in between the couch cushions, under bed pillows. But my most vivid memory of my grandmother was that she loved Jesus.

Nobody loved Jesus like my grandmother loved Jesus. Every time I would say goodbye to her she would always quote me Ephesians 3:20. She would say, "Now remember, Christopher, God will always do immeasurably more than you could ever ask or imagine." She would spend hours in prayer every day, hours writing cards to people in our church, making sure that every word was properly placed.

At her funeral, several members of our family shared about how this diminutive woman (she was not more than 5 ft. tall by that stage in her life), largely unknown to the world, may not have been great by any metrics of the world but will undoubtedly be regarded as great in God's kingdom.

Contrast this with the recent inauguration of our 47th president. The swearing in ceremony took place in the rotunda of the Capital Building this year, which made for some very interesting optics. You had, on one side, many of the members of the outgoing administration—not exactly a happy bunch given that they had just lost the election—along with the former presidents and their wives. And then, on the other side of the aisle, you had the incoming president's family, friends, and political allies—all smiles. But what was perhaps most striking about the incoming president's cadre of guests was the inclusion of some of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the world, the *Who's Who* of American business. This was no doubt intended to project strength and give a visual representation of his vision for America and its entrance into what he called the "Golden Age of America."

The message was clear: I'm here to make America *great* again, put America *first* again. Now, to be fair, there's almost no former American president who would have said I don't want America to be great or first and, even though they may have been good at hiding it, money and power and prestige have always, whether visibly like they were on that day or invisibly, been standing behind the actions of our political leaders.

These are the actions of the kingdom of man. Man's kingdom puts greater value on the strong, the wealthy, the more accomplished. Man's kingdom says, "The first will be first and the last will be last." Second place is the first loser. So, do everything you can to be first. But, as we will see, in God's kingdom, there's a Great Reversal, as Eugene

Peterson likes to call it. Jesus comes along and he turns everything we thought we knew to be true on its head. Those that have poured all of their efforts into being first in this world will find themselves wanting in the next. In other words, Jeff Bezos has nothing on my grandmother in God's kingdom.

It's tempting to buy into the lie that greatness is measured in accomplishments. Maybe you've poured everything into climbing the corporate ladder and you've made it to the top, only to find that there's another ladder to climb. You *may* have been like the rich young man who we learned about last week—not only did you climb to the top but you somehow managed to maintain some semblance of Christian practice—you attended church every Sunday, you read your Bible on occasion, you've kept the 10 commandments. And yet, when Jesus asked you to give up all your earthly possessions, you explained his request away with the same logic used by Satan in the garden to entice Adam and Eve to sin—"Surely, God doesn't mean that. He can't really mean that you have to sell everything you have and follow him."

If that's you, and you want to change, then I have good news for you. You don't have to do this using your own resources. If you try to muster up enough resolve to give up everything and follow him using your own resources, you will fail every time. But, *with God*, all things are possible. It's God's resources that make the sinner clean, it's God's resources that change a heart of stone into a heart of flesh, it's God's resources that make it possible for a camel to enter through the eye of a needle!

This truth was made plain to Rahel and me a few short years ago when we were looking for a home. When we first moved to the Boston area, we lived a small, 2-bedroom apartment. I used to love giving people a tour of our apartment because I could have them stand in one spot and show them almost the entire apartment from that one spot. Now, don't get me wrong—Rahel and I felt incredibly blessed with God's provision; it's location was one of the main reasons we started attending Hope. But, during Covid, it became really hard for our family of five. It was clear to us that one of two things was going to happen—either we were going to go insane or our downstairs neighbors were going to go insane—and neither was good. So, we started looking around for a home.

Our first thought after jumping into our housing search was, "Aren't there too many zeros after that number or is that a typo?" Our second thought was, "Lord, please help us." And he did. I won't go into all of the details but, suffice it to say, after we looked at the final house we were going to look at, we were told by our realtor, after giving our final offer, "You'll never get this house for that much money." Which turned out to be mostly true because the next day the seller's agent informed us that her clients had decided to go with a stronger offer.

But our resources are not God's resources. Rahel had been praying and felt like the Lord was saying that he was going to take from the hand of the strong and give to the weak. And so later, after being told that we did not get the house, we received a phone call stating that the sellers had decided to go with our weaker offer instead. Our realtor, who was not a Christian, essentially did a Nebuchadnezzar and said something like, "I've never seen anything like this before. This God of yours must be the real deal." Since moving into our home, I've heard numerous stories like this of how God has provided for the housing needs of others in our church.

I'm not sure what you're up against. But I do know that God's resources are endless and that a life lived in complete dependence on him, while not immune from trial, is a life of adventure, intrigue, joy and freedom, and rest. Friend, the righteous will never be forsaken. Jesus' yoke is light. Can you say, like the missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, "I never made a sacrifice." Giving up is inevitably receiving in God's economy.

With this, look with me, if you will, at the parable that Jesus tells. Now, there's a few things to note before we look at this parable. First, it was not uncommon for Jesus to use a parable to make a point. Jesus often told stories, as Rabbi's of his day were inclined to do, to illustrate a greater truth. Knowing this, it's important that we don't get too bogged down into the weeds of the parable and instead focus on Jesus' larger truth that the last will be first and the first last.

I sometimes make this mistake when I tell stories to my 7-year-old. Just the other night, she asked me to tell her a story about unicorns. So, like any good dad would, I agreed and started with the usual, "Once upon a time, there lived a girl named Sheila." Adonai: "Um, dad, I think you mean Adonai, the girl's name is Adonai." Me: "Yes, of course, Adonai. Once upon a time, there lived a little girl named Adonai. And Adonai loved unicorns." Adonai: "Um, dad, stop right there. I think you meant to say that Adonai loved horses. You see, Adonai doesn't know anything about unicorns yet." Me: "Oh, okay. Once upon a time there lived a little girl named Adonai. And Adonai loved horses. But Adonai had never ridden a horse." Adonai: "Okay, dad, look, why don't I just tell the story."

I say this to point out that it's easy to get caught up in the symbolism of the parable—what does this or that represent—or whether or not the parable was a true reflection of the agrarian culture of that day, but Jesus' point here is actually quite simple: just because you come first to the party doesn't mean God is somehow obligated to reward you. In fact, it's often quite the opposite. In God's kingdom, God often chooses to reward the poor, the weak, the unnoticed, the marginalized, the latecomers.

The thing I love about this parable is that it gives us a glimpse into what the kingdom of God or, as Matthew likes to call it, the Kingdom of Heaven, is really like. It's interesting to note that no other gospel writer includes this parable. I think this is because Matthew is fixated on describing for his reader what the Kingdom of heaven is *really* like. How cool is this! Jesus gives us another glimpse into what the "new" world (v. 28) looks like. Again, this word for new world is **literally translated as the "re-generation" or "re-birth" (palingenesia in Greek).**

And what is perhaps most amazing about this new world is that, in some sense, it had already come in the person of Jesus. You'll remember that at the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus says, "All authority in heaven *and earth* have been given to me." This is not merely a future kingdom, something to look forward to, as if this life on earth is a temporary holding period for the true Christian experience to come. **Revelation 11:15: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."** Look at Mark's retelling of this same story in **Mark 10:29-30. He writes, "Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.'"**

What is astonishing here and what I think most Christians miss is that our king, Jesus, is reigning now in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father, and that the kingdom of God is a present reality. Sadly, if you were to walk into many of our churches today, you might get the false impression that God's kingdom is something to aspire to or a future reality. But the truth is that Jesus, right now, through his followers living out their faith in him, is in the process of redeeming every corner of God's creation, casting salt and light on every area of society—whether personal, political, economic, social—through living out a life of love for God and one's neighbor.

The late Christian philosopher Dallas Willard likes to call this work of redemption God's "divine conspiracy." I love that! It's the idea that with every Spirit-empowered deed, Christians are slowly, incrementally overcoming the evil kingdoms of this world with the good of God's kingdom. And, as it turns out, this is good for everyone. Not only do Christians benefit from this divine conspiracy, but so do the societies in which they live. When Christian employers treat their employees well, the company often benefits. When honesty and integrity are the norm, relationships often flourish. When Christ-like compassion is shown, the poor or sojourner are often helped.

This is what heaven looks like.

Okay, let's keep moving.

## **The New World Is Not a Meritocracy**

One of the first things that we see here is that the new world is not a meritocracy. IN the new world, you're not judged on merit, what you can bring to the table. The thing that is probably most grating about this parable for those of us who have grown up in a meritocratic society like the United States is that the workers who worked all day are paid the same as those who showed up in the eleventh hour. You might be thinking, "What kind of injustice is this? This isn't fair!" If so, that's good, because that's what Jesus wants you to think.

Jesus wants to show us that God's fairness isn't measured according to man's understanding of fair. Fair in God's economy is "The wages of sin is death." We all deserve to die and suffer the consequences of our sins. Not only this, but greatness isn't determined by how much effort you put in or by how much wealth you amass at the end of your life. After all, like the bumper sticker says, "He who dies with the most toys, still dies." The point Jesus is making here is that merit is put aside in the kingdom of God so that God's grace can prevail. If salvation—past, present, and future—is all of merit, then who needs God? If salvation is of man, then man gets the credit.

I'll admit that accepting God's grace shown to others can be hard. As many of you know, I play the guitar and I've been playing for several years. In "guitar years" that actually translates to about about 2 years. Which is to say, I'm not much better than I was in college. But for those of you who also play the guitar (or any instrument for that matter), you know that there's no worse feeling than playing the guitar with someone who's not only better than you, but when you ask them "So, how long have you been playing?" they respond with something like "Oh, this thing, I just found it in my parent's closet last week and started playing it." Yeah, that doesn't feel great.

But this also happens in the Christian life, right, like all the time. We've all known people who have been a Christian for just 2 or 3 years and now you find out they are writing a best selling book or starting a new Christian podcast. They're always talking about the amazing miracles that God is doing in their life and how they talk to God like they talk to their friends on the phone.

When this happens it's very easy to compare yourself to other Christians and think like the older brother in the story of the prodigal son, "God, I've been a Christian for decades now. Here I am plodding away, loving my wife, providing for my family, going to LIFE group, trying to be a good employee. I've done all the things! What gives? Why

am I not seeing fire from heaven? Why am I not seeing answers to my prayers. And all the while, God is looking down, saying, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or, are you jealous because I am kind to others? Son, daughter, don't worry, my grace is sufficient for you too."

The new world is not a meritocracy; it's all of grace.

## **The New World is Upside Down**

A second characteristic of God's kingdom that we see here is that the values of this new world are completely upside down. What kind of world is this where kings are servants, little children are given priority, the first are last, the poor are rich? I mean, this sounds like something more akin to Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory than anything in this world. All that you thought was important. All that you thought mattered. Throw it out the window. It's crazy and awesome all at the same time.

If you don't believe me, look a little further at **Matthew 20:25-28**, where Jesus says, **"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

The only earthly example that comes remotely close to this might be the first few months of the pandemic. Overnight, essential workers became invaluable. Workers in factories that made toilet paper or Clorox wipes or those who delivered food to your door became some of the most important people on the planet. Even now, when I go to Costco and they're low on toilet paper, I feel the urge to stock up.

When we consider the kind of upside down logic of God's kingdom, my question to you this morning, then, is "Is this what we look like?" Do we look like an upside-down community or not? Does what we wear, how we talk, how we treat others, what we value reflect the upside down nature of the kingdom of heaven or the more typical kingdoms of man. Does who we privilege in our churches or in our personal lives reflect the true character of God? Do you only invite people into your home who look like you or who are into the same things you're into? I'm grateful that this is a church striving to be an upside down community, a community that in many ways doesn't make sense to the outside world.



Would you just pray with me right now? Let's ask God to help us look more and more like a true kingdom community.

Lord, we want this to be true of us. We want to be a community of all peoples where your son, Jesus, is king. Even if it means being seen as weird by our friends, help us to be weird for you. Give us grace to consider the other person more important than ourselves. Help us to look more like Jesus. Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. Amen.

### **The New World Is Full of Rewards**

Not only is the new world not a meritocracy and not only is the new world an upside down community. Thirdly, we see here that the new world, the kingdom of God, is full of rewards.

Look with me again at **Matthew 19:27-29**:

**Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?"**

Peter. He never fails to disappoint. You have to feel sorry for Peter sometimes. You know he means well, but he just can't help himself from saying the first thing that comes to his mind. You can imagine Peter standing there listening to Jesus' interaction with the rich young man, the wheels are turning, no doubt feeling pretty good about his odds knowing that unlike the rich young ruler, he and his fellow disciples had literally left everything to follow Jesus. So, Peter turns to Jesus, waiting for the right moment, and possibly with an air of confidence, says, "So, Jesus, yeah, that foolish rich young ruler, what was he thinking. By the way, Jesus, what's in it for us?"

Now, before we condemn Peter for his response, we may want to look in the mirror. What about you? You may have never said it out loud, but have you ever had the thought, "Jesus, I've given up everything for you—my job, my aspirations, my free time, my money, my home, a spouse—and I'm not seeing the goods. Have you seen my marriage, have you seen my kids, have you seen my relationship with my parents? My life looks pretty crummy right now. You didn't exactly fulfill your end of the bargain, Jesus. Where's the pay off?" And God is saying, "All that stuff that you just mentioned....it was never yours to begin with. You just follow me."

But, once again, just like he does to us, Jesus shows compassion on Peter. Listen to what he says next:

**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.**

It's interesting to me what Jesus does not say here. He does not say to Peter, "Listen, bro, I'm not sure if you noticed, but we're not exactly in this for the money. I mean, we don't exactly have angel investors backing this thing up (okay, we might have angels backing it up, but not angel investors). I mean, you should just be grateful that you get to hang out with me and experience all this cool stuff." No, that's not what he says. He says that those who follow him will be rewarded. In fact, they'll be rewarded a hundredfold—in other words, an incalculable amount. And not only that, for good measure, he also throws in eternal life.

For all the faults of the health, wealth, prosperity movement (and there are many), they've got one thing right. That is, God wants to reward those who follow him. And that reward is not just on layaway. It's in the here and now. Where they go wrong is, I think, in two ways: first, they misunderstand the true nature of the reward, and second, they underestimate the amount of the reward.

In our Missions 101 Discipleship Class last fall, we used a book entitled *When Helping Hurts* and, in that book, the authors make the claim that all poverty is due to broken relationships. I don't have time to go into all of the ramifications of this statement here, but suffice it to say, if this is true—and I believe it is—then the inverse must also be true, namely that health, wealth, and prosperity is the result of relationships as God intended them to be. Now, this is not to say that prosperity is guaranteed by mending all of our personal relationships as if we could somehow do that. The reality is that we live in a world of broken individuals and broken systems, many of which are outside of our control. But, it is to say that to the extent that our relationship to God, to ourselves, to our immediate spheres of influence, and to our society are whole, we will experience prosperity.

My guess is that many of you have witnessed this. I've said this before, but one of my favorite things about being an elder at this church is that I get to sit on membership interview after membership interview and hear how God has brought untold good out of restoring broken relationships. And, just anecdotally, not once have I heard someone say in one of these interviews, "Pastor, I thank God that he saved me and that I'm now wealthy beyond my wildest dreams! Praise God, I'll never have to worry about money

again!" Friend, financial reward may accompany a life devoted to following Jesus (who, by the way, was not rich by the world's standards), but I don't think it's primarily what Jesus has in mind when he talks about reward. How can it be? You and I both know individuals who are rich and miserable. Money can sometimes be a curse, let alone a reward. If you don't believe me, just read a few stories about those who've won the lottery.

Also, when we look at verse 29, the nature of the reward cannot simply be material. You may not mind a hundred houses, but the thought of a hundred mothers and fathers is probably a bit overwhelming. Again, the point here is that what you gain in following Jesus will far outweigh anything that you give up. And, consequently, what you gain is something the world can't give.

One of the greatest rewards I've found in following Christ for several years is the ability to calm and quiet my soul. This isn't to say that I don't get stressed (Rahel will tell you that), but it is to say that my soul has managed to find rest in my toddler-like attempts to incorporate the practices of Jesus into my daily routine.

Lately, I've been meditating on **Psalm 131**.

**O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.**

For me, a restful soul has been its own reward. Knowing that I don't have to burden myself with all of life's trials has been one of the more rewarding aspects of my life. This is a reward that no amount of money can buy.

The second way in which health, wealth, and prosperity proponents misinterpret the Bible's teaching on reward is that they don't go far enough. Look again at the end of verse 29. Matthew tells us that all those who have left everything for the sake of Christ will receive hundredfold *and, O, by the way*, they will also receive eternal life. God's not interested in merely granting you your best life now (as if 80 years of wealth really amounts to much when you consider eternity anyway); no, he's offering you an eternity of riches! Streets of gold, mansions beyond your wildest dreams, treasures beyond your wildest dreams. And if that's not enough, then, Jesus—the very author of life, love, and happiness! Christian, no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart of man has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

The point is this: in the new world, in the kingdom of heaven, Christians will lack no good thing. They will be given every desire of their heart. No Christian will come to the end of his or her life and say, "If only I had kept more, if only I had clung tighter to the things this world offered me, if only I had listened more to my gut, if only I had had this or that, then I would have been fulfilled." My prayer is that we all could say, like Hudson Taylor, "I never made a sacrifice because giving up is inevitably receiving."

## Conclusion

So, in conclusion, we need to look to Jesus. We need to look to Jesus to see what heaven is like. Jesus was the "firstborn of all creation" and yet he made himself a servant. Jesus fully embodied what it means for the first to be last. Paul, in **Philippians 2:1-11**—in possibly some of the most kingdom-centric words ever written—says it this way:

**So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

If you're a Christian this morning, your king was born among animals and placed in a feeding trough. He was a refugee. He was a nomad who washed his disciples' feet. And he died on a Roman cross. Is a servant greater than his master? Does your life look remotely like that of Jesus' life? Or, does it look like the life of someone who's trying to do everything they can to hang on to that one thing, like Ananias and Saphira, that maybe nobody knows about. Friend, you're not fooling God. You see, the kingdom of heaven is for the least of these, the last of these. This is what the life of Jesus showed us and this is what Matthew was trying desperately to get across to his readers.

There's one other almost insignificant variant in Matthew's recording. You have to look carefully to notice it. Look at **vs. 30 in chapter 19**. Jesus says, **"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."** But, then, in verse 16 of chapter 20, instead of repeating the phrase, Jesus makes a subtle change. He changes the order from **"the first will be last, and the last first"** to **"the last will be first, and the first last."**

Why does he do this?

As I sat with it, the only reason I could come up with is that Jesus wants to emphasize the first half of the saying. In verse 30, he's making the point that those who are considered great in this life—the first—will actually be found wanting in the life to come. In verse 16 of chapter 20, he's making a slightly different point, saying that those who come late—the last—and are still given all of the benefits of the birthright of the firstborn are the recipients of God's saving grace.

Church, this is you and me. We are the "last." We have been shown much grace so *that* we can create a new kind of family, a new kind of community, one that tells the story of a different world, not only a world to come, but a world that is now here, right in front of us, made up of those sitting next to us, a world that is defined by love for one another, love for neighbor, and a love for our king.

This is what heaven looks like.

Let's pray.

## Discussion Questions

1. How does Jesus' teaching that "the last will be first and the first will be last" challenge the way we typically view success and status in today's world?
2. Why do you think the rich young man found it so difficult to let go of his possessions? How do we sometimes rationalize holding on to things that Jesus calls us to surrender?
3. Pastor Chris tells the story of finding a home as an example of trusting in God's provision. Can you share a time in your own life when you saw God provide in unexpected ways?
4. Pastor Chris argues that the kingdom of God is not just a future hope but a present reality. How does this change the way we live out our faith today?
5. Jesus teaches that true greatness comes from serving others. What are practical ways we can embody this upside-down way of living in our daily lives?
6. What do you think of the argument that true prosperity comes from restored relationships? Have you observed this to be true in your own life? What are some practical ways that we can begin to shift our understanding of what it means to be prosperous?

