

Apply The Word

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Message Info

Title:

The Scandal of Grace

Speaker:

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Date:

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Scriptures:

Matthew 20:1–16

Theme: Marvel at the Master’s mercy if you would receive it.

Introduction: Competitiveness can be a good gift from God. However, many of us can buy into the seemingly logical thinking that the first shall be first. When we read the words of Jesus—that the first shall be *last*—we may think it sounds profound while failing to grasp what he is teaching. In Matthew 20:1–16, Jesus uses a parable to explain his difficult teaching. In the parable, the scandalous grace and mercy of God is put forth to help us see ourselves rightly and respond to God accurately.

Matthew 20:1–16 can be broken into two parts, both of which highlight the Master as the main character:

1. The Master’s work (1–7)

- The parable Jesus tells is of a Master going through the process of hiring and deploying laborers.
- This parable is about the kingdom of heaven, illustrating what exactly Jesus meant by “the first” and “the last”. The groups of men hired first and last are especially noteworthy in the story as it pertains to what Jesus is teaching.
- God is the Master in the parable. He is the one who owns everything, who hires laborers, and who determines rewards.

2. The Master’s reward (8–16)

- The “first shall be last” reversal begins literally; the Master commands his foreman to pay the laborers in order from last-hired to first-hired.
- The Master pays the last-hired group a full-day’s wage, leading the first-hired group to believe they would receive 12x as much since they worked that much more.
- However, when they are paid the same amount, they “grumble” at the Master (v. 11).
- By paying everyone the same, the Master has accomplished three things: he provides for everyone’s needs, he demonstrates payment is according to grace, and he exposes the stingy hearts of the first-hired.
- “The last will be first, and the first last” means that grace is never earned. Those who see their need for grace the least are the last in the kingdom.

Questions:

1. How do you see yourself tempted to grumbling throughout the day?
2. What does your grumbling show you believe—or don’t believe—about God?
3. What attitudes keep you from marveling at the mercy of God?