



Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.
Romans 12:10

Who is first is not in our hands it is in God's. It is God who makes the last first and the first last. This proverb of Jesus is supposed to make us think about how we view the kingdom of God. God's standards are not our standards, he has a different value system. We should desire to see others be first, rather than try to make ourselves first, in doing so we have nothing to lose.



Who is the most important, what makes you important and why it's important to be important.

It is supposed to make us rethink the effects of works and the importance of grace. It is supposed to make us reassess who we think of as most important.



What examples of this verse can you think of in the world today?
What examples of this verse can you think of in the church today?
How do we have to change if we want to take this verse seriously?
What does this say about equality in the Church?
Is it OK to be competitive in spiritual things?

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The First and the Last



But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. Matthew 19v30

These words are recorded on Jesus' lips four times in His ministry. He probably used them many more times; they were almost a catch phrase. Why did He use them so often? and what did He mean by them?

These words are considered one of Jesus' 'hard sayings'.
Why do you think this is?



They undermine our way of looking at things. If we are first we expect the reward for being first; we do not expect it to go to someone else. What is more, being first is very important to us, large parts of our society are driven by competition. By the way, this verse is also a classic wisdom riddle. Jesus was a wisdom teacher.



Read Matthew 19v16-30, Mark 10v17-31
In this passage, who was the first?
What made him first?
Why did he end up last?



In this passage, who was the last?
What made them last?
How did they end up as the first?

On a broader level, how does this apply to the world today?



Does Jesus say that all first are going to be last?
No, He uses the word 'many'; He does not say all. Luke 13v30 confirms this.

Was the rich man automatically last?
No, he was only last because he could not respond to Jesus.

At first reading, this proverb contrasts the rich man and the disciples; Jesus promises those who have sacrificed in order to follow Him, great blessings and rewards in the eternity. But at closer reading, it seems that Jesus is also issuing a warning to his disciples.



What warning is Jesus giving them?
He is saying that position in the kingdom of God cannot be bought even by the amount we humble ourselves, or what we sacrifice.



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Does this mean the least significant person in church is always the most important?

The greatest in the Kingdom of God is not automatically for the one who gives up the most. Jesus is warning the disciples that their sacrifice alone will not make them first in God's Kingdom. Cf Matt 20v23. The rules of status we use in the world do not pertain to the Kingdom of Heaven, even when applied inversely. The last are not always first.



What does this say to people in leadership?
What does this say to those who want to push themselves forward?

I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism. Acts 10v34



Read Matthew 20v1-16
Who was first in this parable?
How did they become last?
Who was last in this parable?
How did they become first?

The first were those who struggled through the heat of the day. The last were those who worked only an hour.



In a hire pool, who gets picked first?
Who gets picked last?



The first in this parable refer to the Jews who bore the law of Moses, through the heat of the day, working hard for their salvation, only then to be saved through Jesus and not their own efforts. The last are the gentiles who were given salvation without keeping the law or working for what they received. This can also apply today, the first are those who know and serve God all their lives, working hard, sacrificing and keeping away from sin. The last are those who accept Christ only at the end of their lives, having done nothing to deserve what they are paid.

At the end, in this parable there is not first and last, all are equal and receive the same. However hard you work you can never earn salvation, it is only and always a gift.



What then does this parable say about human effort?
God's rewards are given by grace, they are not earned.



If the last will be first does that mean there is no point in trying to do your best?
It does mean that we need to change why we are doing things. We need to do them to please God not in order to make ourselves first.



Read Luke 13v22-30
Who are the first in this passage?
Who are the last?
What made some of the first last?
What made some of the last first?

Here the first are good, honest, religious people, the advantaged and the privileged, who acknowledged Jesus but never responded to him. The last are ordinary people who respond in faith.

Who are we in this passage?



Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. Matthew 21v31

How does this apply to us?
Make sure your Christianity is real.



Read Mark 9v33-37
What does Jesus say here about being first and last?
Is Jesus encouraging us to want to be first?

Jesus is saying the route to greatness in the Kingdom of God is through service. The problem is that it is a different kind of greatness. We are not called to be servants so that we can become the greatest in God's eyes, being the servant is greatest. Jesus is not encouraging us to be the least so we can become the first, He is encouraging us to ditch our ideas of what it means to be first, what it means to be great.



What things are great in God's sight?
Many of the things on this list we are in control of, humility, love, service, but as we have already seen, these things do not of themselves make us first in God's sight. Some of them we have no control over, we are great in God's sight because He loves us.



Some other examples

Luke 16v19-31

Mark 12v41-44

Matthew 5v3-10

1 Samuel 16v1-13

1 Corinthians 1v26-31

Luke 14v711

The rich man and Lazarus

The widows offering

The beatitudes

David chosen as king

Who was called

Choosing seats

How was the first last?

How was the first last?

How was the first last?

How was the first last?

How was the first last?

How was the first last?



According to what we have learnt so far, who are the first that will be last?
If we look on outward appearances are we in danger of confusing the first and last?
In what way do we need to change our attitude towards being first?
Should being first be a controlling factor in our lives?

In society being first is everything, being top, having the most, is everything. In the kingdom, our ambitions must be different, we want to please God, we want to obey God, we want to serve others.



In what ways do Christians want to be first?
In what ways do churches want to be first?
How much of this is productive?



Consider. Billy Graham arguably the most successful evangelist of modern times, he obeys God and does all that God requires of him.
Will he be first or last?



A widow, never achieves fame or notoriety, but quietly thorough the year in prayer and service obeys God and does all that is required of her.
Will she be first of last?

Which of the two will God consider more important or worthy of more honour?