

Matthew 19:30

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

Analysis

Jesus' paradoxical statement 'many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first' inverts worldly hierarchies. Those considered spiritually privileged (religiously established, wealthy, powerful) may end up last in kingdom accounting, while the humble and overlooked may be first. This saying frames the following parable of laborers (20:1-16) where late-coming workers receive equal pay with early workers. Reformed theology emphasizes grace over merit—kingdom standing depends on God's calling, not human achievement.

Historical Context

This saying responds to discussions about reward for discipleship and the rich young ruler's rejection of Jesus. Jewish expectation assumed Israel's priority and Gentiles' secondary status. Jesus announces reversal: tax collectors and prostitutes enter the kingdom before religious leaders (21:31). The last-becoming-first theme appears repeatedly in Jesus' teaching (Luke 13:30, Mark 10:31).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What 'first place' privileges might you wrongly assume guarantee kingdom status?
2. Who are the 'last' people you tend to overlook whom God might exalt?
3. How does God's grace-based kingdom challenge your sense of deserving?

Interlinear Text

Πολλοὶ	δὲ	ἔσονται	πρῶτοι	ἔσχατοι	καὶ	ἔσχατοι
many	But	shall be	shall be first	last	and	last
G4183	G1161	G2071	G4413	G2078	G2532	G2078

πρῶτοι

shall be first

G4413

Additional Cross-References

Luke 13:30 (Parallel theme): And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.

Matthew 20:16 (Parallel theme): So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

Mark 10:31 (Parallel theme): But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.