

Matthew 20:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

Analysis

Jesus concludes the vineyard parable with 'the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.' This encapsulates sovereign grace—God rewards according to His generosity, not human merit. The phrase 'many be called, but few chosen' distinguishes external gospel call from effectual calling. Reformed doctrine of election sees here God's sovereign choice determining salvation. All hear the gospel call; only God's elect respond in saving faith. Kingdom inclusion depends on God's choice, not human worthiness or timing.

Historical Context

The parable responds to Peter's question about disciples' reward (19:27) and the rich young ruler incident. It addresses Jewish assumptions about covenant privilege guaranteeing kingdom entrance. The workers hired at different hours all receive the same wage, illustrating grace over merit. This teaching prepared disciples for Gentiles' inclusion in the church alongside Jews.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's sovereignty in salvation affect your view of evangelism?
2. What 'first place' assumptions about your spiritual standing need challenging?
3. How should God's generosity shape your attitude toward newer or different believers?

Interlinear Text

Οὗτως ἔσονται οἱ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι
So shall be G3588 last first and G3588 first
G3779 G2071 G2078 G4413 G2532 G4413

ἔσχατοι πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰσιν κλητοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί
last many for be called few but chosen
G2078 G4183 G1063 G1526 G2822 G3641 G1161 G1588

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 19:30 (Parallel theme): But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

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

Matthew 22:14 (Parallel theme): For many are called, but few are chosen.

Luke 15:7 (Parallel theme): I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Matthew 7:13 (Parallel theme): Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Romans 8:30 (Parallel theme): Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Luke 14:24 (Parallel theme): For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

Romans 5:20 (Parallel theme): Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Romans 9:30 (Parallel theme): What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

Matthew 21:31 (Parallel theme): Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.