

MATTHEW 19:27 – 20:16 GRACE: THE GREAT LEVELER

In the story of Alice in Wonderland, when Alice floods Wonderland with her own tears and swims ashore with a cadre of other creatures, she (and they) wonder how they'll ever get dry. The Dodo suggests the best solution would be to hold a caucus race, and so he marks out a course (a "sort of circle," Carroll writes), sets the animals around it, and tells them to start running. After a half-hour or so, he declares the race over. And who won?

"*Everybody* has won, and *all* must have prizes," the Dodo declares. It's up to Alice, of course, to forage in her pockets for suitable prizes for everyone.

That sort of thinking (everyone gets a trophy) prevails today in some circles. But some years down the road we are able to see the effects of such things. Actually, there was no competition in the dodo's race. Everyone was just trying to get dry as soon as possible. And as "nice" as the notion of everyone getting a trophy sounds, it usually doesn't work in the real world. If everyone gets the same reward, regardless of performance, efforts or results, then where is the incentive to do better? (The story of the economics professor.) The point is that this line of thinking eventually becomes counter-productive.

Today we will run into some basic economic theory, but we will quickly see, no matter how well it seems to work on earth, that the theory doesn't always translate into principles that operate in Heaven.

Last week: Children were not worthy. The rich young man was worthy and if he wasn't, then who can be saved?

Peter's smugness – we aren't like this guy. (The one we thought was worthy but now walked away.)

What shall we have? Huh? Huh? Huh? Peter is opportunistic, but you can follow his logic. We have done, at least in a sense, what you have told this guy to do. He walked away, but we are still here. What sort of reward do we get?

Jesus answer: verse 28 – specifically: You – the 12, will sit on 12 thrones and judge the tribes of Israel. (status) Generally – No one who has answered the call to be a disciple and having entered the kingdom will lose anything. The recompense will be 100 times greater than anything that was lost on earth. And don't forget that you've already attained eternal life.

Verse 30: "But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Now, they were tracking with Jesus until He spoke that last line. Everything made sense to them until that point. That is where Jesus left the plain of the normal, human reasoning, as it has to do with risk and reward. Once again, Jesus turns conventional thinking on its head. The kingdom of Heaven doesn't run on the same principles as earth. It can do this because there is no sin there. That is why Utopia/ Heaven can exist. And in this case, the kingdom of heaven is speaking of eternity and not the part of the kingdom that exists now. How do we know that? Because we know from other parts of the Bible that that is when the rewards are handed out to believers. And the judgment at which the disciples will be judging the 12 tribes happens in eternity.

This parable doesn't speak of salvation!!! Salvation is the same for everyone. You cannot be "more saved" than anyone else. This speaks of rewards and status in the eternal kingdom of Heaven.

Ever had the privilege of being in the ritual where people were being picked for teams on a playground? (The last men to be hired were undesirable.) That doesn't happen in Heaven.

The landowner continued to hire even though He didn't need any more help. He hired out of grace and concern, not out of need. (That is the God we serve.)

The rewards truly out-value the sacrifices.

But the way we see things here and the way God sees them in heaven are two different matters. Pastors and missionaries don't automatically get to go the front of the line or get the best mansions in heaven.

There are mothers and grandmothers, wives and teachers who have spent their lives on their knees in prayer, trying to guide loved ones and acquaintances through life and into heaven. They will be closer to first than most anyone else.

Grace levels the playing field. For those that aren't public speakers or "people – people" there are rewards!

The economy of Heaven is not slanted the way the economy of earth is.