

It's one thing to visit a foreign country as a tourist. It's quite another thing to live there permanently. The adjustments required are much more massive in scale. Last week, we talked a bit about the reality of cultural differences. Knowing these can help us when going to visit another country. But moving to a country requires significant time and patience to learn the new culture. Many of you have been through such adjustments. You have moved from another country to Canada. Others have made similar adjustments in moves from different parts of the country; or you may have moved from the farm or small town to a larger city; or maybe you've moved from a hot climate to a cooler climate like ours.

Whenever a move like that is made, it requires cultural adjustment. Some people get to experience this when they go to school in another country. A University that sends its students on foreign exchanges prepares them with an article about four common states of cultural adjustment.¹

First stage is the **honeymoon** stage. New arrivals anticipate the newness of everything. They may experience euphoria and excitement. They explore the new sights and surroundings. They have a surface, tourist-like involvement in the host culture. The similarities and differences between their new and home culture intrigues them. And they're open minded, motivated and interested in learning new things.

But then comes the second stage – **Culture Shock** accompanied by irritation and hostility. The novelty of the new culture wears off. They've discovered things that bug them in the new culture. Small issues become major catastrophes. And they experience homesickness missing family, familiarity and friends.

The third stage is **Gradual Adjustment**. People begin to find humor in cultural differences and gain perspective. They have increased familiarity with the new culture, its logic and its values. They have some highs and lows as the adjustment continues. They've discovered they like some things in the new culture more than their home culture. They learn deeply about life abroad and question earlier assumptions about the world.

The final stage is **Feeling at Home** in the new culture. They now appreciate some aspects of the new culture and criticize others more objectively. They're no longer negative about differences between new and home culture. So they begin to live and work to their full potential.

¹ <http://www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/outbound-students/life-in-a-foreign-culture-tips-for-cultural-adjustment-while-abroad.html>

Now I couldn't help but notice as I was reading through this list, how similar this is to the Christian life. When people first come to Christ, rededicate their lives to Christ or get baptized, they usually go through a honeymoon phase. They're excited about everything Christian and the God with whom they enjoy this new relationship. They experience a lot of different things in the Christian culture that they enjoy – a worship service; Christian community where everyone is so wonderful; a small group where people are so real and everything about God and life are amazing.

But then we go through a kind of culture shock. The novelty of newness wears off. Not every worship service is amazing. The Christian community where everyone was once wonderful now has some people who bug us. Behind the scenes of the church, people struggle, there are conflicts and sometimes Christians act just like the people in the world. And they miss some of the friends & familiarity of their old lives. So a stage of almost disillusionment happens where the person may even wonder if it was worth doing this Christian thing. Or they constantly go back and forth between the cultures. They keep one foot in the world and one in the church attempting to hold on to both.

But then they discover as time goes on that we gradually adjusting to the culture of the church. Yes, that one thing or one person bothers a little. But nobody's perfect. And at least some people in the church are honest about that and turn to Christ. And as we grow, we realize that there is a depth to Christ that sustains us through dark times. We begin to see that there's some funny things in the church but that's part of being in a family. We slowly find ourselves less bothered by things accepting the reality about people both in the world and in the church.

Finally, we feel at home in Christ and the Christian community. We appreciate the good aspects of the Christian culture while criticizing others. Yet we realize that we're here for life and begin to set down roots in this community and with this God with them we will spend eternity.

This journey of change and adjustment is one every Christian must make and continue to make and at times repeat. When we came to Christ, we were transferred to a new kingdom. We no longer live as citizens of the world and it's ways. We are now citizens of the kingdom of heaven whose king is Christ. He taught and lived out the ways of the kingdom of heaven during His time on earth. Part of our journey includes continuing to learn kingdom values and adopt them into our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us.

So today, we are going to see some more of these kingdom values that are quite contrary to the values of the world. We will see Jesus teach or show these values on His way to Jerusalem and the cross. As we discover the, Jesus

calls us to adopt these kingdom values into our lives which require a journey of cultural adjustment. But we are also to recognize we may struggle with the culture shock these values present to our current way of living. I pray God may reveal these to us and help us move from culture shock to adjustment and feeling more at home in Christ's kingdom.

Matthew 19:27-20:34 (ESV)

²⁷ Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" ²⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Laborers in the Vineyard

20 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴ and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' ⁵ So they went.

Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' ⁷ They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' ⁸ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' ⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹² saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³ But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?' ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last."

¹⁷ And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, ¹⁸ "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. ²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." ²² Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." ²³ He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." ²⁴ And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and

said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

²⁹And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. ³⁰And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” ³¹The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”³² And stopping, Jesus called them and said, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³³They said to him, “Lord, let our eyes be opened.” ³⁴And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

Last week, we ended with Jesus alerting the disciples to the difficulty of the rich person entering the kingdom of heaven. The disciples are astonished because they believe that the rich had a head start on their way to heaven. But Jesus reassures them that with man it is impossible to be saved but with God all things are possible.

Our passage today picks up with the next encounter. Peter speaks up in verse 27. He states, “See, we have left everything to follow you. What then will we have?” Now one thing I appreciate about Peter. You never wonder where he stands on things. He spoke what was on his mind without thinking much about how it would come out. Basically Peter points out to Jesus, as if He didn’t know, that the 12 have left everything to follow Him. It’s true. They gave up their livelihoods. They were willing to travel around with Jesus and leave their families behind for a bit. They were willing to be identified as Jesus’ disciples at least when times were good. So Peter asks, “What then will we have,” or “what will we get out of this Jesus?” Peter has expressed the common worldview of the day. If you put time and effort into something, you should get equal reward for it.

Jesus’ reply seems at first encouraging to Peter’s position. “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.” So Jesus describes the end time when He will finally establish His kingdom on earth. He will be on His glorious throne. The 12 would be given their own thrones to judge or rule over the twelve tribes of Israel. The judge held significant position and power in that day. This would be quite the reward. If Jesus had just left things there, Peter’s worldview would have been confirmed. Whoever put in the most effort and gives up the most will get the greatest reward.

But Jesus adds in verse 29 “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name’s sake will receive a hundred times and will inherit eternal life.” So people who leave behind loved ones or possessions for the kingdom will receive a hundred times more. You may have to give up your house but you’ll be invited into 100 houses. You may have to leave your father back at home but you will receive 100 fathers through the people you’ll meet in and through ministry. But I think the key word is “everyone.” Not only would the 12 receive reward. Everyone who followed Christ would receive reward. We don’t know how that sat with Peter. Maybe he was still okay with it because he saw a throne as some sort of plumb position above everyone else.

Yet Jesus goes on with verse 30. “But many who are first will be last and the last first”. What does that mean? Jesus tells a parable to illustrate this. He uses an image - the grape harvest. Vineyards were common farms in the land at that time. During harvest, the owners of large vineyards needed workers to bring in the harvest. So they would go to the marketplace and hire people. If he needed more, he would go back and get more. The owner meets the first workers and promises them a denarius, worth one day’s wage.

So say you are one of these workers. You are at the marketplace or the temporary job office at 5:30 AM. The owner comes into the center to hire workers. “I am looking for workers all day. I’ll pay them 10\$ an hour. The workday will be 12 hours.” You quickly volunteer and look forward to earning 120\$. You notice as you labor that more workers are hired and show up at 9 AM in the vineyard. Then some more come at noon and at 3 PM. The work day is just about done when you notice some new workers starting at 5 PM. Finally 6 o’clock rolls around and the work day is done.

So everyone lines up to get their pay. The owner instructs the foreman to pay those hired last first. So you’re at the back of the line but you can see and hear what’s going on at the foreman’s desk. The 5 PM workers come to the table. The foreman pays them each \$120! You’re amazed and then ecstatic. You think that the owner has changed his mind to pay everyone \$120/hour. That means you’re going to pull in 1440\$ for one day’s work.

Then the 3 PM workers go to the table. They also get 120\$. “Oh,” you think to yourself. “He’s actually paying 40\$/hour. That 120 seemed a bit unusual. But you can live with 40\$. That’s still \$480 for the day’s work. Then the 12 PM people go to the table. They also get \$120. Now you’re confused. Ok, they worked 6 hours for 120. That means they’re getting 20\$ an hour. Well, it’s not as good as I first thought but at least I’ll be getting 240\$ for the day. But how does that work for the person who worked 1 hour?

Finally, it's your turn. You are sweaty and exhausted from 12 hours of labor. The foreman smiles and thanks you for a full day's work. Then he hands you 120\$.

You look at the foreman and then over to owner. Finally, you explode. "Are you kidding me? We worked all day for you in the hot sun. You gave people who worked 1 hour the same wage that we got for working 12 hours? That's not fair. What kind of an employer are you?"

The owner looks at you and smiles a little. "Friend," he says. "How much did you agree to work for this morning?" "120 dollars but that's before I knew . . ." He goes on. "I do you no wrong. Take what belongs to you. I chose to give the last worker the same I paid you. After all, it is my money. I can choose to do what I want with it. Or do you begrudge my generosity?" Then Jesus repeats the same statement made earlier. "So the last will be first and the first will be last".

What are we to make of this? From a human standpoint, this does seem unfair if our perspective is solely focused on comparing ourselves with what others have received. But if our perspective is solely focused on what we have received from the landowner, then things are different. Here's the kingdom of heaven value. **God chooses to be generous and gracious independent of human standards, sometimes the last will be first.** On earth, we need some labor laws and standards because human beings are sinful and greedy. If not governed, they might try to cheat their employees or employer. But we cannot apply the same standard to God. There is no sin or selfishness in Him. So if He chooses to be generous or gracious, that's up to Him.

We need to respond in a couple of ways. Maybe we need to confess our own grumbling when God doesn't act according to our standards. Maybe God shows favor to someone we think doesn't deserve it. But when we step back for a moment, hopefully we realize we didn't deserve His grace either. Or maybe we need to step back and take stock of all the gifts and grace God has shown us.

Peter functioned according to the equation a greater sacrifice earns a greater reward. But Jesus reveals that God doesn't function according to human labour standards. He is way more generous and gracious. If we have been begrudging against God because of this generosity we need to step back and repent!

The account continues with the journey to Jerusalem. Remember this is Jesus' final journey. He's left Galilee in the north. He's come down the east side of the Jordan river to the southern region beyond the Jordan. That means he's

likely in the valley that leads into the Dead Sea. Now he and the disciples start the journey up to Jerusalem. There were great crowds who surrounded him because they'd heard of his healing ministry up north. But while they make their way up to Jerusalem, Jesus takes the disciples aside with another prediction of what's ahead. He gets more specific. He will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes. He will be condemned to death. He will be handed over to the Gentiles or Romans. Then He will be mocked, flogged and crucified. Yet there is hope. He will rise on the third day.

Then we come on another scene. The mother of James and John, 2 of Jesus' disciples, approaches Jesus with her sons. Most Bible commentators believe this was Salome, the sister of Jesus' mother Mary. So James and John were actually Jesus' cousins. Salome and some other women travelled with the disciples looking after their food and financial needs. Since they were so much older than the disciples, there was no charge of impropriety. So this is Jesus' aunt coming before him.

She kneels out of respect. He asks "What do you want?" She replies "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom." This was a request for the highest positions in Jesus' kingdom apart from Jesus Himself. To sit to the right of the king meant you were second in command. To his left meant third in command. Salome asks for both. Maybe this request is prompted by Jesus' revelation earlier that the 12 will receive 12 thrones to judge the 12 tribes. So Salome thinks she has to get her request in to get the two closest thrones. It is nothing short of a power grab for position of privilege.

Jesus responds to James and John. "You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am to drink?" Jesus is not talking about their ability to sip out of Jesus' favorite cup. The cup symbolized the destiny of a person's life and usually coming hardship. So Jesus inquires if they can drink the cup of suffering He will face.

They confidently say yes without knowing what they're really saying. Jesus affirms that they will indeed drink the cup of suffering. James will in fact be the first of the 12 murdered for the faith. John will suffer exile to the island of Patmos where he will receive the visions of Revelation. But then Jesus says that "to grant who sits at his right and left is up to God the Father".

So the request is denied. When the other 10 hear about this, they are furious. Why? Was it because they were so holy that they were a little disappointed James and John had chosen a sinful path? No. They wanted these positions of greatest honor. Maybe they saw Salome, James and John trying to use their family relationship for personal gain. It

isn't what you know. It's who you know. Those are the ways of the world if you want to get ahead and grab positions of greatness.

But it's not that way in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus contrasts worldly greatness with kingdom of heaven greatness. In their world, the Gentiles or Roman rulers lorded it over other people and exercised authority downward. They imposed their will on the population and enforced it through military occupation. Though the people didn't like it, they saw that the Romans had the power. Therefore they imitated that view. The way to power and greatness is to get positions of power and influence.

But Jesus declares the kingdom of heaven's value of greatness.

God sees the truly great as those willing to serve others. (20:20-28) Great people in the kingdom of heaven think of and act on behalf of others. Whoever would be first must become a slave. But Jesus does not only pronounce this. He Himself lives it out. He came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. He would become the ultimate servant by giving Himself up for the sins of everyone else. He would die a humiliating death that tarnished Him as a criminal so that we might have life. But that's why He came – to give Himself up so that we might have life.

One way, we can apply this kingdom principle to our lives is by asking ourselves the reasons behind our projects and ambitions. Are they to make us look great or to make God look great? Are they primarily to satisfy us and our loved ones or are they about serving others? Now I'm all for healthy self-care and boundaries. Many Christians serve to the point of burn out and bitterness because over commit beyond their own resources. But sometimes our ambitions, projects and even our ministries are more about us than the Lord or the others we claim to be serving. This kingdom value is a hard one to learn in a world of selfies, American idol and followers. But it's not impossible. It may simply involve asking ourselves "is what I'm doing to the glory of Jesus and for the benefit of others?"

The final scene occurs on the outskirts of Jericho. This city sat in the bottom of the Jordan Valley. From it rose a steep road up to Jerusalem. Jesus used the Jericho Road as his setting for the man beaten and left for dead only to be rescued by the Good Samaritan. Matthew tells us that a great crowd accompanies them. What do you think they're expecting? They think Jesus is going up to Jerusalem to claim the throne. They want to be part of the action. It's pretty cool being in the presence of a winner or someone powerful. So off they go passing two blind beggars sitting by the

roadside. When these men hear that Jesus passes them they cry out for mercy from the Son of David. The crowd tries to shut them down.

“Jesus is going to claim the throne in Jerusalem. He doesn’t have time for dead dogs like you”. But they keep crying out. Jesus stops and asks what they need. “Lord, let our eyes be opened.” So Jesus out of pity, touches their eye and their sight is restored. Then they follow Him. **God values the helpless and vulnerable. (20:29-34)** Jesus has done this again and again throughout His ministry. Vulnerable and helpless people attract Him. God cares about each one and He cares about you.

I don’t know about you, but I know I didn’t really think about the weak until I experienced weakness or someone in my family suffered weakness. Especially if it’s a member of your family, you are sensitized to how other people treat your “weak” family member. The crowds may not have been impressed with Jesus stopping to care for those two blind men. But what do you think their mothers thought of Jesus’ care for their sons? There is something deeply right about caring for vulnerable and weak people. It’s not very flashy. But it does something pretty deep.

These kingdom of heaven values might not be very attractive at first. God is gracious beyond our standards of fairness. True greatness is found by serving others. God grieves for the vulnerable & rich. But the more we think about them and adopt them, the more we discover that these are real life – this is life apart from the mercenary; self-interested “what’s in it for me” kind of approach of our world.

Think about a world where the ruler shows more grace and generosity than anyone expects. In the new heaven and earth, there will be no such jealousy because of God’s grace - just celebration.

Think about a world ruled by someone who was willing to completely give Himself up so that others might have life. He suffered and endured punishment we deserved so that we might not have to face that. Think about living with this person to whom you are so indebted. You will constantly be reminded of His sacrifice and love for you.

Think about a world where ambition is tied to serving others. So any new project, any grand initiative is done with humility and designed to serve and benefit others – not to make a name for the one with the idea or the one driving the project. What might it look like to live in a kingdom that is not self-serving but self-giving.

Think about a kingdom where the vulnerable and weak are looked after and adequately cared for.

That's life in the kingdom of heaven. We experience it partially today in the church and Christian community.

But when Christ returns we will experience it completely. The more we embrace the new culture of the kingdom of heaven, the more we will adjust to it, live by it and finally feel at home there. May God give us His strength and vision to deeper kingdom living today as we prepare for His eternal kingdom coming someday.