

First Place or Second Place
Mark 10:23-31
October 18, 2015

And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

If you're old enough, you might remember a rather unusual advertisement from the Avis car rental company. It said, "We're number two. When you're number two, you try harder." It wasn't a very good advertisement. We want to be the best. We want to be number one, not number two.

If you were going to have serious surgery, and you could choose your surgeon, would you want the one who finished first in his class, or the one who finished second? When your car breaks down, do you want the best mechanic or just anyone who happens to be available? Do you want your team to finish first or second?

Our society is so "first place" oriented that just participating doesn't count. We want to win. We want to be the best. We want to be first. Granted, a competitive spirit isn't all bad, as long as it doesn't lead you to violate your Christian principles.

However, there are times when first isn't best. Today we are going to look at our Gospel reading, and other Scripture, that will help us to see that second can be far better than first. After all, the early bird might get the worm, but it's the second mouse who gets the cheese.

In the text, Jesus is challenging his disciples to follow him. In verse 31 Jesus says: *Many who are first will be last, and the last first* (Mk 10:31 ESV). People who are first in what? First in possessions, first in riches, first in materialism. In other words, people who believe that first on earth means first in heaven. Your eternal life might be drastically different from your earthly life. Jesus asked: *What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?* (Mk 8:36 ESV).

The sacrifice of Jesus is a perfect example. When Jesus hung on that cross, there was no one around who would have declared him the winner. He suffered. He bled. He died. Game over.

But that wasn't true, was it. What looked like defeat was actually the victory. In Jesus' death, God was setting aside the first in favor of the second. He was doing away with the temporal sin sacrifices of the Israelites in favor of a permanent sacrifice for all sin. God set aside the old covenant in order to establish a new covenant. The author of Hebrews tells us: *[God] does away with the first in order to establish the second* (Heb 10:9 ESV).

A "second over first" also happens with our birth. Job tells his friends: *Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble* (Job 14:1 ESV). Why are we full of trouble? Because sin is present in us from the moment of conception. Sin rules every person's life, even little children. Everyone is born in sin. We don't become sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners.

Paul warns us that sin will dominate the life of anyone who has only a natural birth. *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned* (1 Co 2:14 ESV). The natural man knows only natural things, and the most natural thing for mankind is sin.

Remember this little equation; one birth equals two deaths. Without the new birth of baptism, there is no hope of heaven. Without the new birth of baptism, physical death means eternal death – eternal separation from God.

Jesus told Nicodemus: *I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again ... No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit ... You must be born again* (John 3:3, 5-7 NIV). Our second birth is better than the first.

The Bible also speaks of two "Adams." The first "Adam" refers to the man Adam who was created by God at the Creation of the earth. The second "Adam" refers to Jesus Christ. Compare the two "Adams":

- § The first Adam was created out of the dust of the ground. The second Adam was with the Father from all eternity.
- § The first Adam was created in the perfect image of God, but through self-will brought sin to every person on earth. The second Adam came to earth to destroy the sin that became our heritage from the first Adam.
- § The first Adam caused a broken relationship to exist between God and his Creation. The second Adam became the sacrifice for all sin to restore people to a right relationship with their Maker.

Scripture gives us this comfort: *For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous* (Ro 5:19 ESV).

Another "second over first" is the second body being better than the first. Our first body is our physical body. Our physical bodies have two major defects.

First, our physical body is grossly inferior. We get old. We get sick. Our later years are often plagued with problems of functioning properly. Our bodies can become overcome with pain. We spend a small fortune trying to keep all the parts running properly or trying to fix the parts that break. And for all that we do, we will still eventually die, are buried in the ground, and return to dust.

The second problem with our physical body is that it is hard to discipline. Our physical body wants what it wants. It is constantly seeking its own way. It is always prompting us to go against God's will. It seeks to rule us completely. Our physical self wants to be the king of our little kingdom. It yearns for others to serve us and bow down to us.

On the other hand, we have our second body – our glorified body. Paul says this about our glorified bodies: *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality* (1 Co 15:51-53 ESV).

Our second body will last forever. We won't be able to abuse it. We will never use it up. It won't grow old, or tired, or helpless. It will never get cancer. It will never have a stroke, it will never need medicine or surgery. It will never die. Listen, once again, to the words of Paul: *This perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality* (1 Co 15:53 ESV).

Our last comparison is the second coming of Christ will be better than the first. Now, that is not to say that Jesus' first coming wasn't important. Our Savior coming to Bethlehem was supremely important.

Without Christ's first coming, there would be no second coming. Without his first coming, there would be no reason for a second coming. Jesus' first coming was the way of preparation. His second coming will be the way of consummation.

If Jesus had not come the first time, there wouldn't be anyone to participate in his second coming. It is Christ's first coming that necessitates his second coming. Jesus first came to make us his own, and he will return to take his own to be with him.

Consider the greatness of his second coming. When Jesus came the first time, it was to condemn sin and give us a way to live apart from sin. When Jesus returns, it will be to destroy sin once and for all. He will abolish death. He will put an end to all suffering and sorrow, all injustice, all disease, and all calamities of nature. He will dispatch Satan and his minions to the Lake of Fire for all eternity.

At his first coming the world crucified him. At his second coming the world will confess him as Lord of all.

At his first coming the world spat on him, mocked him, laughed at him, and rejected him.

At his second coming all the earth will bow down before him.

Philippians chapter 2 tells us: *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Php 2:9-11 ESV).

Our second birth is better than our first birth.

The second “Adam” is better than the first “Adam”.

Our second body will be better than the our first body.

Christ’s second coming will be better than his first coming.

If you’re one of those people who are coming in second – praise the Lord.