

THE COUNTERINTUITIVE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

#2 – “The First Shall Be Last; The Last Shall Be First”

July 3, 2005

²⁹“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” ³²They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³“We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.” ³⁵Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” ³⁶“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. ³⁷They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” ³⁸“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” ³⁹“We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.” ⁴¹When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴²Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:29-45 TNIV

Introduction: Just as we tend to think of truth as something existing within binary constructs, we also tend to believe that truth must confirm our previous suppositions. But many of the greatest truths in life are counterintuitive, that is to say that they take us by surprise. The most profound truths shake us to our core and cause us to rethink everything we thought we knew.

- I. Some Counterintuitive Truths Seem to be Logical Non Sequiturs
 - A. A “non sequitur” is “a statement (as a response) that does not follow from anything previously said” (Webster’s), a Latin phrase meaning literally “it does not follow.”

- B. Truth statements can be absolutely logical and yet absurd.
 1. A famous example: (a) all telephone poles are elephants, (b) Sally is a telephone pole, (c) Sally is an elephant.
 2. In the previous example, the problem is not the obviously logical conclusion, but the wrong assumptions that have been made “a priori.”
 - C. Thus we see that correct assumptions (conditions) are absolutely essential to logical truth statements.
 - D. Consider untruthful statements that once seemed logical.
 1. “There is nothing morally wrong with slavery, since it has been with us in some form throughout history.”
 - a. David Hume called this an “is to ought fallacy.”
 - b. The problem here is that an ethical judgment is made based solely on past experience (what is).
 2. “If the glove doesn’t fit, you *must* acquit!”
 - a. Simpson attorney Johnnie Cochran brilliantly used one piece of evidence to discount others.
 - b. The problem here is that an absolute judgment on past action is based on one present observation.
 - E. Correct presuppositions and conditions are everything when it comes to making logical judgments.
 - F. We know that Jesus’ counterintuitive teaching that “The first shall be last, and the last first” is true, so we are forced to question our non sequitur presuppositions.
- II. “Many who are first will be last, and the last first.”
- A. Jesus’ counterintuitive teaching challenges presuppositions.
 1. If we sacrifice enough, we’ll succeed in this world.
TRUTH: We will be rewarded, but eternally so.
 2. If God loves us, He’ll do whatever we ask.
TRUTH: God loves us, and will do what is best.
 3. If we live for God, we will reign with Him.
TRUTH: If we live for God, we’ll submit to Him.
 4. If we follow Jesus, we can do great things.
TRUTH: We can do all things, but through Christ.
 5. If we follow Jesus, we’ll be rulers.
TRUTH: If we follow Jesus, we’ll be servants.
 - B. The very definition of greatness in the Kingdom of God is radical servanthood (v.43, Greek *diakonos*, or “attendant”).
 - C. Those who are “Number 1” in the Kingdom of God are slaves of Christ (Greek *doulos*, or “bondman”).

Conclusion: Jesus did not just teach counterintuitively, he lived counterintuitively. He was the personification of radical servanthood, living to serve rather than be served. To follow him is to commit to a life of service without expectation of adulation.