

# ***GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM!***

## ***MATTHEW 18:1-6***

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We are in a series of messages looking at what Jesus has to say about this topic called the Kingdom of God - Jesus begins His ministry with this announcement Mark 1:15 - *The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.*

The basis of the idea of the Kingdom is that contains 3 basic realities :**A King, a Domain and an Effect.**

Now from this point we are deliberately looking at the words of Jesus beginning in Matthew's account of key passages that Jesus talks about the Kingdom. Not exhaustively but hitting some of the key places.

- Beginning with the Matthew 5 - looking at the beatitudes - what we noticed was that these were not prescriptive of a life that is blessed but that in the Kingdom the unqualified are qualified and included!
- Two weeks ago we took some time in Matthew 6 specifically verses 10 and 33 at what the Focus of the Kingdom is all about. That clear focus in the Kingdom must begin and remain focused on the Action of God and that my ReAction is to repent - both in prayer and lifestyle - praying '*Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven...and to Seek first the Kingdom and His righteousness...*'
- **Last week we looked Entrance into the Kingdom - specifically that it comes through - Solus Christus - In Christ Alone!**

**Today I am going to move farther into the book of Matthew specifically at Matthew 18 at a passage that is familiar to many - Matt 18:1-6**

*1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.*

It does not matter what cultural setting you may find yourself in - I have had the privilege to tour ancient castle ruins in Scotland, Roman ruins in Rome and the Aztec Pyramids in Mexico.

- **What is interesting in seeing places like these is how much has changed.....**

But then how little has changed....sure today we have technology and gadgets galore

- **but we still live among a people who worship....**

**We worship much like ancient peoples of long ago.....Greatness or perceived Greatness.....remember how Lance Armstrong was on the 'Top' of his world until he was found out for using performance enhancing drugs.....**

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- And then there was Michael Phelps....until we saw him taking drugs....
- And then there are those 'Cinderella' stories that captivate the hearts of young and old alike....in movie or books....like 'The Pursuit of Happiness' played by Will Smith that told the story of a Chris Gardner who spent a year homeless and later became a successful business man worth millions of dollars.....

**There is something captivating by the story of the simple becoming the Greatest....**

- **Its a story that calls to our hearts and gnaws at our basic sense of self esteem....**
- And none of us are exempt.....as I stood next to the older Pastor I was serving under....while being introduced to a person of importance in the Urban community....a person who just moments before did not even bother to make eye contact with me or greet me.....**but when my boss introduced me as Pastor.....suddenly something changed....**
- **I literally watched their eyes light up with esteem and value that was not there just a few moments earlier....**
- I have watched men and women replay this type of response when they discover persons whom I know or have known.....

**Whats an even more painful part of this story?**

- **There have been far too many times that I have cherished the change - the shift from seeming insignificance to importance.....from suspicion to substance - from a nobody to a person of rank and perceived importance because I am greeted or called out by US congressman.**
- **You see the truth is we have all fed at this trough..... if we are honest.....the search to be 'known' and validated.**
- **Because one of the deepest fears of the human heart.....is to not matter.**
  - **And so we learn early don't we....?**
  - As children on the playground...
  - **Strength and Success become the definition of our Rank - Importance and Influence** as the teams are chosen and there you stand waiting to be chosen as the son of an immigrant who not only never threw a baseball he despised the game.....so you can imagine where I wound up in the line up.....

**But this evaluation hasn't stopped at the playground has it? Its in the marketplace.....**

**Its in the Church** - a successful Church - a successful Ministry.....is measured....by size and impact.

- **Interesting I wonder how modern Church consultants would evaluate the ministry of John the Baptist.....his disciples are literally leaving...'He must increase....'**
- Even at the end of his life from prison he sends word are you actually the Messiah...

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**My point is that we often find ourselves asking what Jesus disciples asked.....  
Who is the Greatest?**

- Matthew 18 Jesus has just been confronted about the temple tax and sends Peter to fish out the tax from the mouth of a fish - the issue was not the tax but what Jesus was saying to His friends....
- **You are Son's not Subjects.....**

This is where we join Jesus and His disciples....who then ask this question -

- Jesus.....we just saw you go up the mount with Peter, James and John if fact you seem to hang out with them a little more - **Jesus if we are Sons and NOT Subjects... verse 1**
- **“Who then is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”**

Let me translate this into today's vernacular....Jesus we get it...You are the Nominee so who is gonna be your VP – Where do we Rank in your Cabinet?

- This is fascinating because I read this Mark 9 as well as Peter James and John are coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration and they are ‘seizing the moment to talk with each other about what rising from the dead meant’ Mark 9:10.
- **They were attempting to understand this Invisible Kingdom as best they could from their realm.....Jesus resurrection was more than a Dead body being raised.....**

Now they ask.....

- Who is the Greatest.....cause this is the way it works Jesus **somebody has to be the highest in rank and importance.....**

Matthew 18:1.....here is the fascinating thing....

**Jesus immediate response....was not to Speak.....but what He does is stunning....**

- **He takes the least and lowest person in the room.....and makes them the Most!**
- **He takes a (small) child and places him in the center....**

**You know one of my annoyances with the Millennial generation?**

- Is there perception of how much they know.....it will take a minute or two in their life....and they will begin to understand they do not know as much as they think they do.....

Jesus takes the least....a small child..that everyone knew – did not know or understand a thing...not even sure how young at least under 7.....

- No education
- No accomplishment
- No strength - just weakness
- He places him in the ‘middle’ word means more than just proximity it would be the place reserved for the person of importance in a gathering.....

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### **Verse 3 unless you Strepho - Convert**

- This word is connected to a known Hebrew Idiom.....
- To become again children.....

### **Change direction - do an about face.....**

- Unless you Convert - **take the opposite way of thinking and living...**
- Unless you take the divergent course....

### **And become like a little child.....oh my goodness.....**

- I have heard this so often referred to that Jesus was referring to **childlike faith.....meaning a simple faith....**
- **Beloved that is totally missing Jesus point....**
- Oh by the way - in case you miss the point Isaiah 9 reveals exactly HOW God choose to birth the Kingdom...*for unto us a Child is born, to us a son is given.....*

I have held 7 of them Babes.....and countless others.....

- **NONE of them began with anything to 'offer'.....**
- They did not have 'childlike' faith on mom and dad.....**they had complete and utter Dependence!**

**Truth be told.....that infant would die if not feed, changed and bathed.....**

- **They can do NOTHING.....**
- *Jesus who is the Greatest.....the person who really makes the difference....?*
- Ah you need to Convert and become like that Babe.....dependant.....

**Verse 4 Whoever Humbles himself.....as this child....  
What?**

- Whoever Chooses.....**the lowest rank, place as this child....**is the greatest in the Kingdom!
- **Beloved Greatness in the Kingdom is NOT NOT NOT about what you bring - my powerful gifting.....ministry.....**

**Greatness in the Kingdom is not about what you bring - IT IS ABOUT WHAT YOU LET GO OF!**

**Greatness is not defined by 'Ascent' but by 'Descent'**

- **Jesus Descended into Greatness and His invitation is the same to us!**

**Great leadership is not about excellence in gifting, talent, and vision - Great Leadership is about finding the lowest and least in the room and making the the most!**

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**Now let me point out that there is a false Pride that 'Apes' humility -**

- False Lowliness that appears to choose humility but it is for the purpose of attaining Greatness.....so we have politicians serving at a soup kitchen.....once every election cycle.....
- The Greatness Jesus described in Matthew 18 is how a person acts when no one is watching.

Col 2:18 The Voice

*Don't be cheated out of the prize by others who are peddling the worship of heavenly beings and false humility. People like this run about telling whoever will listen what they claim to have seen; but in reality they testify only to an inflated mind, saturated in conceit—not in the Spirit.*

***Matthew 18:4 Become as this child....***

- As a Child - lack of rank comes naturally....
- As an Adult - it becomes a deliberate act....

**Live like Jesus - find the least the lowest and chose them!**

Look at verse 5

*If you receive a child in My Name - **receives Me**....oh my goodness*

- I will never forget when a friend of mine who had adopted a child from Uzbekistan was hit with this revelation - holding his daughter who could do nothing to reciprocate all that he had done for his daughter and the Lord took him to Matthew 18....
- And he began to weep when he realized....as he was holding his daughter who will never be significant in this life - he was holding Jesus.

**To choose those who cannot elevate or propel my position or status.....**

So what does all this look like? 3 Things I want to close with -

**1. Using the WRONG measuring stick comes naturally!**

- Rank
- Accomplishment
- Excellence

There is Samuel and God says.....Dude man looks at the outward appearance but I look at the heart....

- I can I say this it is all too easy to USE the wrong measuring stick in almost every relationship - what does it look like to look for what Jesus looked for the heart?

Mark 9 - Luke 12:1 - ***The Leaven of the Pharisee's***

- The Pharisees....
- Evangelistic
- Generous Givers
- Prayed

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Wait a minute....in my first Big conference on Discipleship these were the very indicators described as how we define a person who was maturing in their walk with the Lord – those we would consider as leaders.....

Studied the Scripture.....but Jesus watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees  
Luke 12:1 which is hypocrisy.....

- Now we are not talking about living a flawless life.....hybocrisy is not living without failure..
- Hypocrisy is living with a heart disconnected - and believing our own press release....I must be important....
- We are talking about using the wrong measuring stick.....

### **2. The Kingdom Requires Choice!**

- An About Face from what comes naturally!
- **A choice that requires us to lay down our demand to defend self and make ourself matter.**

### **3. Becoming like a Child - actually means letting GO**

- Letting go of rank, power and position
- Jesus came in total Dependance.....
- Invites us to become like a Child

#### **A - Dependent**

#### **B - Simplicity**

of love  
without agenda

#### **C - Risk of rejection and hurt**

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