

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

Who is the Greatest in the Kingdom of God?

Matthew 18:1-6

1 What if you and I really took seriously what the Bible says about who God considers great in His kingdom. What could be the implications of that?

This question was asked or implied 3 times by the Lord's disciples.

The first time was In the 8th chapter of Luke. Lord Jesus took Peter, James and John to the top of Mount Herman where they witnessed the transfiguration. The Lord became brilliantly white as He talked with Moses and Elijah. Then as Moses and Elijah disappeared and Jesus came back to normal again the Shekinah ¹ cloud enveloped them and a loud voice in living quadraphonic sound said, "This is My Son, Whom I have chosen; listen to Him!" ² ₂ With dreams about what the Lord's fabulous kingdom might be like an

¹ Shekinah was the brilliantly bright cloud showing the presence of God. It appeared as a bright cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. It signified God's presence at the dedication of Solomon's Temple.

² Luke 9:35.

argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. ³

The second time was when they entered in Capernaum from the transfiguration in Matthew, Chapter 18, verses 1 through 6. This is our scripture passage today.

The third time is a chapter and a half later in Matthew, Chapter 20, verse 21. James' and John's mother is trying to lobby for special political positions for her sons. ³ **“What is it you want?”** he asked. She said, **“Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”**

So, what is the Lord's answer to this very important question? Let's read about it in Matthew, ⁴ Chapter 18, verse 1 through 6. **At that time the disciples came to**

³ Luke 9:46-48 - An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all — he is the greatest”.

Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” 5

And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Let's look at verse 3. It says that the greatest on the kingdom of God is . . . 6

I. The One Who is Willing to Be Converted - v3

The one who is willing to be converted. ⁷ The word "change" ⁴ in the original language means to turn around, to change your life, to commit your life to a different lord. ⁸

The lord of the world's ways is Satan. You really need to understand this. Look at the moral and ethical direction this world is headed in. Look at our own American culture. It's diametrically opposed to what the Bible says is the way of God!

After Peter made the Good Confession, "You are the Christ", Lord Jesus told His disciples He was going to be crucified. At this, Peter rebuked the Lord. ⁵ Then in Mark, Chapter 8, verse 33, ⁹ **Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me,**

⁴ στρέφω.

⁵ Mark 8:29-32.

Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Peter's attitude was the world's way, Satan's way, not the Lord's.

Luke, Chapter 4, verses 5 through 7, records one of the Lord's temptations. ¹⁰ It says, The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.” When were all the kingdoms of the world with their authority and splendor ever given to Satan? Probably when Adam and Eve bit into the apple! When you follow the world and it's ways, you are following Satan! ¹¹

The way of this world is to seek greatness. It does this two ways. ¹² It does it by dominating others. When Absalom, King David's son, was fighting for his father's throne, he used this method to gain the favor of the people. He ordered 50 men to run in front of his

chariot to clear the crowds away so he could parade through the streets of Jerusalem. ⁶ Absalom was so good at this, he gathered enough support to cause a civil war! ¹³

Another way the world's way seeks greatness is by seeking power and admiration. God confused the language and dispersed the population when they tried to build a tower to the heavens. Was this because God didn't want people to build tall buildings? Probably not. It was more likely because their motive for doing so was to make a name for themselves! ⁷ They were seeking power and admiration! ¹⁴

In contrast to the world's way, Satan's way, is God's plan for conversion to Him. ¹⁵

⁶ II Samuel 15:1.

⁷ Genesis 11:4 - Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

The first step is to recognize that you are lost! How many of you were told when you were trying to share your faith with someone, "I don't want to hear any of that religious stuff. You can talk to me about anything except religion and politics." That's not intellectually honest. That's a closed mind. That's a dangerous attitude with eternal consequences. They just want to stay in their rut where they feel comfortable. ¹⁶

The second step is to realize that, because of the cross, you can be found! You're not going to get into heaven when you die because you are such a good person. God's minimum standard for entrance is a perfect life because He is holy and just. Come on, you know you don't have a perfect life. You have flaws. We are all dirty rotten sinners. The only way to heaven is for you to wear the white robe bought by the blood of the Lamb! You are not getting into heaven because you are so good, but because the Lord is! When you surrender your life to the Lord's authority and identify

with Him, God counts you as righteous even though you obviously aren't! That's grace. That's what the cross did for you. [17](#)

The third step is to trust Lord Jesus to provide the salvation (from being lost!) that He promised. That's faith! [18](#)

The fourth step is to genuinely commit your life to Him. Let Him call the shots in your life from now on. That's repentance! [19](#)

Then, make this commitment to His Lordship public by making the Good Confession and being baptized. This public statement of faith is your way of taking your stand. You are demonstrating for the world to see that Jesus is the focus of your life now, not the world and Satan's ways. [20](#)

Finally, through the power of the Holy Spirit, begin to walk with the Lord daily and grow spiritually. Develop

the habits of Bible study, Christian fellowship and prayer.

Now, let's take a look at verse 4 to discover another way to be great in the kingdom of God. ²¹

II. The One Who is

Willing to Be Humble as a Child - v4

The one who is greatest in the kingdom of God is the one who is willing to be humble as a child. ²² Lord Jesus said a little child should be your example in life. What did He mean by this?

"Child" in the original language, implied a little kid. I picture a little one of three, four or maybe five. Think of a little kid that old.

The Lord didn't mean to be childish. He wants you to be child-like. ²³ So, what's childish? ²⁴ Being gullible and easily deceived. ²⁵ Being short sighted by choosing what will bring immediate satisfaction rather

than waiting for something better. ²⁶ Being self centered and needing continual discipline to get their minds from focusing only on their own interests. ²⁷ Being immature and lacking responsibility. ²⁸

The Lord wants you to be child-like, not childish. Think of a typical five or six year old. Think of a kid who has been raised with good, balanced discipline for as long as he can remember. Balanced discipline is the input of both mom and dad. A properly raised child needs one each to be balanced!

The characteristics of a well balanced disciplined child would be; ²⁹ they are willing servants. They want to help. They want to be included. "Mommy, can I help with the dishes?" "No; It would be easier and faster for me to do it myself than to train her to do it!" "Dad; can I help you work on the car?" "No, I'll never get it done if I have to answer all of his 'Why's' or 'What's this'." ³⁰

They recognize their position in the family chain of command. A balanced disciplined kid knows dad and mom have the authority, not them. ³¹ They are humble! What does that mean? ³²

God's word tells us how to be humble. ³³ Romans, Chapter 12, verse 3, Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ³⁴ Galatians, Chapter 6, verse 3, If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ³⁵ The Lord reminded us, For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. ⁸ The Lord Himself does the humbling and the exaltation of His children!

The final characteristic of the one who is the greatest in the kingdom of God is . . . ³⁶

⁸ Matthew 23:12.

III. The One Who is

Willing to Give Himself to Others - v5-6

The one who is willing to give himself to others. We find in verse 5 a very important biblical principle; ³⁷ whoever welcomes someone in the Lord's name welcomes the Lord! ³⁸

Lord Jesus made a prophecy that one day He would return and claim the world back to Himself. When that happens, He will separate people into two groups like a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats. He will say to the sheep, "Come on in and accept your inheritance." "Goats, get out of my sight and go to where you belong."

The goats cry out, "Unfair, unfair. Lord, why are you excluding us?" The Lord answers, "Because when I was in need they came to my rescue and helped me. You didn't. Bye!"

"Lord, wait, wait, wait! When did we ever see You in need and not come to your aid?" The king's reply, "When you didn't stop to help these who were needy, you didn't stop to help Me!"

This is such an important biblical principle. The Lord identifies Himself with His people; especially His people in need! ⁹

Look at the word, "welcome" in this verse. ³⁹ Welcome, ¹⁰ in the original language, means to receive and to show hospitality.

There's a difference between my understanding of hospitality and my wife's. Occasionally my friend Gordon travels to San Diego. He calls to see if he can spend the night with us. We have a guest room but we use it a lot just to store things. The journey is over 600

⁹ Matthew 25:31-46.

¹⁰ δέχομαι.

miles and Gordon drives it almost nonstop. He may stop for a quick bite of food and for fuel. That's it.

I put myself in his place when I plan for his arrival. If I were making that trip I would be so tired that when I arrived at the door I would want someone to take me by the hand, lead me to the guest room, aim me toward the bed and give me a little push. I wouldn't care what the room looks like as long as it had a soft bed.

When Linda hears that Gordon is coming it's a different story. The bed needs to be changed so he will have fresh linen. All of the junk in the room needs to be put away so the room will look clean. The floor needs to be vacuumed. Food needs to be prepared for when he arrives. Now, which of us do you suppose has a handle on the concept of hospitality? ⁴⁰

Welcome implies taking a certain amount of responsibility for your guests. When you receive a

guest, either a friend or a stranger, it implies responsibility. When you bear or adopt a child, you take responsibility for them. That's the idea of welcome.

Now, let's see verse 6. ⁴¹ Whenever you place a stumbling block in the way of someone seeking a spiritual life and you turn them off to it, you're in big trouble with the Lord. ⁴² The millstone/drowning practice was capital punishment in Greece and Syria during this time.

Please don't misunderstand me with what I'm about to say. I am a big advocate of God's people being doctrinally correct. What God's word says must be taken seriously and His authority contained in it must be obeyed. But some churches and Christian organizations emphasize being doctrinally pure to the degree that they foster an atmosphere of criticism. Their whole focus is on making sure the letter of the law is followed fostering a very judgmental climate.

A woman in her late thirties or early forties came to me with her two teenage daughters in my early years as an Army chaplain. The woman and her daughters were convicted that they needed to become Christians and were eager to know what the Lord wanted of them. I explained God's biblical plan of salvation to them and they became very anxious to be baptized. Of the half dozen chapels open at the installation at that time none had a baptistery. I contracted with a church just outside the gates to use their baptistery. An elder of that church arrived to let us in and he stayed to observe. As I was baptizing these women I said, "I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". Following this ceremony the elder approached us and very indignantly stated, in front of these very impressionable women, that their baptisms were not valid. The reason? I did not include the statement "for the remission of sins" when I baptized them!

These women could have stormed out of that church building, walking away from me and the Lord, because of that careless callous judgmental statement! Fortunately these very gracious women just looked at him and me with confusion in their eyes. They had been taught that from this moment on their sins were forgiven and they could start their new life with a clean spiritual slate. But, to this elder, it was essential that those very words be said during each baptism to make it a valid one. When I got the women alone I had to explain to them that some churches (this was one of them) were so focused on wanting to be correct that a critical spirit permeated their whole existence as a church. They were "properly" baptized and should focus now on living and growing in their personal relationship with the Lord.

What would have happened if these ladies had been so traumatized about what this guy said that they would have just given up and walked away from the

Lord? If this is what "religion" is all about they wouldn't want anything to do with it! Would this be causing "one of these little ones who believe in me to sin"?

Listen here, you be real careful with your attitudes when you disciple those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness not to put a stupid stumbling block in their way! ⁴³ The spiritual implications of the millstone/drowning statement here is God's wrath, spiritual death, eternal consequences!

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Remember: when the Lord returns in His glory, He may say to you, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for Me"! ¹¹

<http://biblelifemessages.org>

¹¹ Matthew 25:40.