



## THE GOSPEL OF JESUS WHAT THE SON OF GOD DID

### *A New Kind of Greatness* (Matthew 18:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

The disciples ask a question that we are all asking: How important am I? They may not use those exact words, but that is the general idea. Maybe they're asking it because Peter seems to be taking on a more significant role than the others. Perhaps they're asking it because Peter, James, and John are getting in on things that nobody else is privileged to see. They approach Jesus and ask Him, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom?"

Interestingly, Matthew doesn't record who requested it. Is it one of the disciples who asks it out of curiosity or frustration? Or is it one of the three asking it out of presumptive arrogance? Surprisingly, that doesn't seem to matter. Whoever is asking it, Jesus's answer is the same.

And He does more than answer the question. He takes a child and puts him in their midst. He goes on to say, "The one who humbles himself and receives the Kingdom like a child is the greatest in the Kingdom."

What does it mean to be a child? Surprisingly, I think most of us get this wrong. It is not because they are simple. Children look at life with fresh eyes and a certain naïveté. Although these are admirable qualities, that is not what Jesus is talking about. Children also have a sense of innocence. They are typically considered unpolluted by the influences and temptations of this world. Jesus is not talking about the debatable ethical characteristics of children; He is describing their clear position in society. Children, especially in the first century, have no social position or status. They are at the bottom. They are led around by the hand. They are told what to do. They are expected to follow instructions. This reality is something that is still true today. Jesus is telling His disciples that unless they accept the lowly position of a child, they will not even enter the Kingdom.

Think about it. Greatness is equated with acceptance into the Kingdom. This truth means that it is simultaneously accessible to anyone and extremely difficult for everyone. Unless someone is willing to accept the truth about Jesus (He is God) and themselves (I am a profoundly needy and dependent person made in the image of God), they will not and cannot be a part of God's Kingdom. The Kingdom is the place where God reigns over His people. It is not a democracy. It is not a place where people are the most important thing. It is a place where God is always glorified by those who understand and appreciate God's greatness and their limitations.

Greatness is something we all desire. Maybe not in the specific word itself, but in the idea that it represents. We want to believe that we matter, and typically we do this by comparing ourselves to others.

We just finished graduation season, and most institutions distinguish between certain graduates. A select few have special ropes and sashes around their necks and an asterisk beside their name in the program - something that clearly distinguishes them from everyone else. And if one of these children is yours, you probably have a bumper sticker on the back of your car letting everyone know that your child is an honor

student. Every Christmas card we receive is a litany of great things that your children have accomplished this year. We desire that everyone knows there is something special about our children and that something special makes them great.

Does this mean we shouldn't distinguish ourselves from one another or celebrate our children's or personal accomplishments? Absolutely not! Jesus is the one who has Peter, James, and John receive a special place and privilege among the apostles. The problem is not that there are differences among us. The problem is that we see those marks as the primary sign of greatness. Greatness is not determined by how well we use the gifts God has given us. They were given so that we may honor God, bless others, and understand ourselves. Greatness is determined, at least in God's eyes, as the ones who understand the way things truly are in the world.

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### *Discussion*

1. Why is it so hard for us to humble ourselves and except our lowly position? What are we worried about? What are we afraid to give up? What are we afraid to admit?
  2. What does 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 teach us about the way God works in the world? Also read Deuteronomy 7:6-8. What does God want the children of Israel to know about the reason why He chose them?
  3. Think about how getting this right changes how we respond to every other instruction from Jesus. Think about how refusing to accept this truth complicates and frustrates every other instruction from Jesus.
  4. How has this particular lesson encouraged, strengthened, confronted, or challenged you?
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### *Our Corporate Prayer*

*God in Heaven, we ask for your kingdom to come and your will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven. We also ask that it begin with us. That we would see you for who you are – the Almighty God and ruler of Heaven and earth. That we would see ourselves for who we are - broken and needy people in need of your grace and direction. Teach us to humble ourselves and accept your leading and purpose for our lives. Teach us not to envy others, but instead how we can serve them out of faithful obedience to you. We ask these difficult things for the sake of your glory, others benefit and our joy. In the name of Jesus, Amen.*

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