

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Paradoxology | Truth in Contradiction

TITLE: The Paradox of Humble Greatness

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 18:1-6

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Following Jesus is not always easy. Most Christians want their faith journey to be simple and clear—either/or, black/white, yes/no. However, life with God is often found in both/and tensions or paradoxes. The essence of a paradox is bringing together two seemingly contradictory statements, and the Bible is full of them. God is one; God is three. Jesus is God; Jesus is man. To save your life, you should lose it. To be mature, you should become like a child. And following Jesus into tensions like these is where faith is meant to flourish. Embracing seeming contradictions like these leads to doxology—a life of intentional worship.

What is true greatness? What makes a person great? We all have our own ideas about greatness but we tend to think that great people have great gifts, talents, and abilities; they are successful and accomplish great things; they are famous and popular; they are people who possess great power and influence. In today's world, greatness is measured by doing more, getting more and having more. But Jesus has a completely different take on all this. Jesus says that true greatness means changing from thinking in all these ways and becoming like little children! He tells us that greatness is becoming childlike??? How's that possible? This morning we are going to look at the paradox of childlike greatness or we could say, the paradox of humble greatness. Our text is found in Matthew 18:1-6.

Matthew begins by telling us that at the time Jesus teaches his disciples about humble greatness, he has been telling them numerous times that when he gets to Jerusalem he will be arrested, tried, condemned, crucified, and rise from the dead. But at the same time he's telling them what's going to happen to him, they're arguing about which of them will be the greatest in the kingdom they believe Jesus is about to establish when he gets to Jerusalem! There's a serious disconnect here.

So, Jesus explains to them that greatness in his kingdom means becoming like a little child—that true greatness is childlike greatness. What's that mean? To begin with, the basic fundamental truth of following Jesus is that you must "turn" and become like a child. You have to change your worldview. You have to be all-in. Jesus can't be just be like an app you download. He has to be the OS, operating system (v.3) Then he tells us that becoming childlike means becoming humble (v.4). Humility is not thinking of less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less. But why is a child a picture of humility? First, children trust deeply in someone greater than themselves. Childlike humility is childlike trust. Second, children, when they are in a good family, know they are deeply loved. But how is that a sign of humility? Childlike humility is knowing that you are deeply loved because you are a son or daughter of God. You are loved for who you are, not for what you do—and that is humbling. A person who has a deep trust in God and who also knows they are deeply loved by God—that person is truly great in God's eyes. Finally, we see that humility is a willingness to use power in the service of others (v.5). Finally, Jesus warns those who have great powers and ability to never use that power to take advantage or to be dismissive of the weak and vulnerable (v.6).

God has a deep love, a deep compassion, and a deep concern for the welfare of the least, the lost, and the littlest. Jesus says later in Matthew 25:40—*Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.*

The Gospel of Jesus is that he laid aside his great power, he lowered himself by taking on flesh and blood and becoming like us, and he humbled himself to the point of death on the cross (Phil 2:3-11). In calling us to childlike, humble greatness Jesus is simply calling us to follow him.

For Discussion:

1. Start the discussion with the question—What is true greatness? Who is great in the eyes of the world? List all the things that describe truly great people.
2. What was happening “at the time” Jesus taught his disciples about greatness? Why do you suppose the disciples were obsessed with the “Who’s the greatest question?”
3. How can children be a picture of kingdom greatness?
4. What is the tie between being childlike and being humble?
5. Talk about the definition of humility—Humility is a willingness to use power in the service of others for the glory of God. What kinds of things represent “power” in your life?
6. Talk about the question: Who or where in your life is God giving you an opportunity to serve those who can’t make your world better?