

Luke 9: 46~48

This morning, I want to speak to you on the matter of “Greatness”...

Man’s idea and God’s idea of greatness are vastly different. So different in fact, I guess you could say, they are complete opposites. Man’s definition of “Greatness,” and how it is achieved, is on the opposite end of the scale, in comparison to God’s. The path to “Greatness,” is not *up, up, up...* (as man naturally perceives it to be)...but rather *down, down, down...* Man defines “Greatness” in terms of a “*high position,*” as possessing “*power*” and such, while God’s is just the opposite, in that of a “*low position,*” and a “*humble, meek spirit*”.

Here in this passage, Jesus makes the comment...“*He that is least among you, the same shall be great.*” Stating the fact, that in God’s kingdom, the way “Up” is “Down.” It is he that is “Least” that is the “Greatest.” Rather than striving to be the greatest among men, we must seek to be the least among men. “*He that is least among you, the same shall be great.*”

In Mark’s account of this teaching, he records Jesus as saying, “*If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*” Again, the principle is that in God’s economy, to be “*first,*” is to be “*last,*” and to be “*last,*” is to be “*first.*” **Completely opposite** that of this world...

Now, something I want to make clear here, is that Jesus is **NOT** saying, that it’s wrong to strive to be the greatest. Not at all, in addressing the disciples dispute among themselves as to who would be the greatest, I want you to notice, that not once did He say to them, that such desires were wrong. Not at all, the desire to be the greatest in the kingdom of God is an admirable thing. I would that every single one of us in this room, have that as the chiefest ambition of our life! Matter of fact, it ought to be the “*the hearts desire*” of every born again, follower of Jesus Christ, to be all they can be for the Lord! Therefore, in no way do we see Jesus reproving them or rebuking them for their “*ambitions*” to be the greatest. But rather, what we see here is, He simply seeks to correct their wrong understanding of what it means to be great...

To instruct them as to the meaning of “*True Greatness*”...Jesus calls for a small child, and sits the child next to Him. Now don’t miss what He does here, to teach on the matter of “*Who it is*” that is the greatest in the kingdom of God, Jesus uses a “*Child*” as His example.

(Mt 18) ¹*At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* ²*And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,* ³*And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* ⁴*Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

Now, I don’t want you to miss this...the child becomes the “*focal point*” of His teaching. It’s interesting when you consider the fact, that in answering their question of who would be greatest, that Jesus points to a child, as His *example*, rather than an adult. If we’d be honest, we’d have to say that “*a child*” is the last place we’d look to, concerning the matter of greatness in the kingdom of God.

Notice He says, “²*And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them...*” It may be a “*play on words,*” but you could say, “*He set the example,*” with the example being, a child. In terms of children, we often see ourselves as the “*example*” to them. But here, Jesus declares that children are an **example** to us. He declares, that they possess the “*qualities & characteristics*” of “*True Greatness,*” and that if we desire to be great, then we must learn from the example of a child...

Having set a child in their midst, Jesus begins by making it clear to the disciples, that based on where they stood at that moment, the answer as to WHO would be the greatest among them, *was none of them!* As a

matter of fact, given what He says here, unless they “*Changed*” the way they thought about greatness, they wouldn’t even have a “*Part*” in the kingdom...much less be the greatest in the kingdom.

(Vs 3) *“³Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*

They were disputing among themselves as to WHO it was among them, that would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In response, Jesus makes it clear, that given their “*Idea*” of greatness, not only would the answer be “*None of you...*” and adds, that given their idea of “*greatness,*” they were not even in the “*Realm of the Kingdom of Heaven.*” As far from any of you being the “*greatest in the Kingdom,*” should not be your concern right now, that should be to be “*a part*” of the kingdom.

Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Now some debate that here Jesus is suggesting, that the disciples were not saved...and that He is speaking to their “*Salvation.*” Though it is true, that unless you humble yourself and come as a child, you won’t ever see the kingdom, I don’t believe that is what He is referring to here. I say that based solely on the context of the passage... This is not **a teaching** on “*Salvation*” in the sense of “*Saving the Soul from Hell,*” but rather a teaching on “*Greatness in the kingdom of God.*” It might be best to understand this statement in this sense...

“As far as who it is among you, will be the greatest in the kingdom of God...the answer is none of you. Matter of fact, none of you are even close, you’re not even in the realm. Based on where you stand right now, you’re not even IN the kingdom.”

None of you are even close to being the “*greatest*” because of how you understand greatness!

The current perception you have of “*Greatness,*” is based on this **world’s** idea of greatness... And given that God’s idea of greatness, and this world’s idea of greatness are complete opposites, you are about as far from “*true greatness*” as you can get. “*Your not even **in the realm** of being the greatest in the kingdom of heaven...given that you are not even in the realm of the kingdom of heaven, but rather you currently stand in the kingdom of this world...*”

Unless you change the way you “*think,*” you don’t have the slightest chance of being the greatest.

Except ye be converted...(Except you change the way you think...)...far from being the greatest in the kingdom...you won’t even have a part in the kingdom!

All of that is to say...they were “**Worldly Minded**”... And if they truly wanted to be “*Great in the kingdom,*” it would first require them to change the way they thought of greatness. Listen, their “*hearts were right,*” it was just that their “*Minds*” were not. It wasn’t wrong for them to “*desire*” to be the greatest, just as long as it was not the kind of greatness this world has in mind ...

They were “*thinking worldly*”... By the kingdom of heaven they meant the kingdom which they supposed he was about to set up—his kingdom as the Messiah. They asked the question because they supposed, in accordance with the common expectation of the Jews, that he was about to set up a temporal kingdom of great splendor, and they wished to know who should have the principal offices, and posts of honor and profit. They expected he would reign as other kings did. They supposed he would have his great officers of state, as other monarchs had, and they were ambitiously inquiring who should hold the highest offices. But here, Jesus seeks to correct their views and expectations. No such things would take place. From these notions they must be turned, changed or converted, or they could have no part in his kingdom. These ideas did not fit at all the nature of his kingdom. He had not come to establish a “*Physical*

kingdom,” where He would sit and reign on a throne, along with His closet companions filling the principle offices. Quite the contrary, in His kingdom, it would not be the “*affluent, the powerful and skillful*” holding the chief positions...but rather the “*humble, the meek and the lowly*”!

Complete opposites... To teach them this truth, Jesus uses a “*Child*”...which you might say, is the complete opposite of a full-grown man. Picture this...here stands this little tiny child, surrounded by these huge, rugged, statures of men... Yet Jesus says to these men, “*If you want to be great...you must become like this child...*”

(Vs 2~4) ²And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, ³And said, *Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* ⁴Whosoever therefore shall **humble himself as this little child**, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Let me repeat that...⁴Whosoever therefore shall **humble himself as this little child**, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus says, “*The way UP...is DOWN...*” Jesus says, “*If you men, want to hold the highest position, it will require you to lower yourself to the lowly position, as that of a child*” You see the picture? Men, it will require you to go “*Backwards*” rather than “*Forwards.*” You need to “*Decrease*” and not “*Increase.*” The “*First shall be Last, and the Last shall be First.*”

Notice, Jesus gave a “**Clear Answer**” to their question...“**Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?**” The answer...⁴**Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

Why children? Children are, to a great extent, destitute of ambition, pride, and haughtiness. They are characteristically humble and teachable. If the disciples wanted to be “*Great,*” they must lay aside their ambitious views and their pride, and be willing to occupy their proper station—a very lowly one.

They likely looked on the child and thought.... “**What can they do?**”

A little child makes no claims of worthiness or greatness. He simply submits to the care of his parents relying on them for all that he needs. He knows he cannot meet his own needs and has no resources to stay alive. That is the kind of humble submissiveness that results in greatness in God’s eyes...
--John MacArthur Jr.

In closing, it’s important that we don’t miss the point Jesus is trying to make with the child. At the heart of this teaching, seems to be the innocence, pureness and teachable-ness of children. The picture here is the innocence of a child. The child is not yet **corrupted** by this world... Full grown men are not as pure, not as innocent. Matter of fact, full grown men are completely opposite that of children. They are prideful, arrogant...set in their ways. That is in contrast to a child, who is yet innocent, pure, and teachable... A full-grown man has a mind that is ingrained with the ways and teaching of this world! In contrast to a child, whose mind is yet to be corrupted by it...

That helps us better understand what Jesus meant when He said, that we “*Must be born again!*” He was saying that we must start all over. Everything we have learned in this world, is the opposite of the ways of God. Therefore, we must humble ourselves in mind and spirit, and become as a weak, dependant little child, trusting in the Lord as a child does his father.

Beloved, no one can argue the fact, that there was no greater man to ever have graced the earth with his presence, than Jesus of Nazareth... Here we are some 2000 years later, and He is still the most well

known and most recognized Name in the entire world. (Both believers and unbelievers). How did He accomplish such a feat? By humbling Himself... (Philippians 2:7~11)