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Text: Matthew 18:1-6
Title: Kingdom Greatness!

Intro: What makes a person great? A person may have exceptional skills and abilities; they may win contests and achieve much success by the world's standards, but in God's eyes, those things are unimportant for the truly great are those who are humble servants. Jesus said, ***"The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted"*** (Matthew 22:11-12, NIV). Servants are great in the kingdom.

To be great in the kingdom of God requires humble service, yielding to God's will not our own. I am not talking about false humility. False humility is to deflect praise we truly desire. False humility is bragging about how humble we are, falsely portraying self-deprecating humor. Jesus is not speaking of false humility. He is speaking of true humility.

True humility takes on the form of a servant. Jesus is our model of humble servanthood. Paul in Philippians 2:4-8 said, ***"Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death- even death on a cross!"***

True humility requires vacating the mind of a self-seeking, self-centering, self-honoring, and self-promoting attitude. In other words, denounce selfishness. Christ came to humble us, let there not be among us a spirit of pride.

God will not share the honor due Him with anything or anyone else.

Backdrop:

Verse 1 says, "At that time." Matthew connects the following discourse with the circumstances just previously shared. Peter completed the task of paying their temple tax and has rejoined the body of disciples. Excited with the idea of Jesus' sovereignty and spiritual power, they looked forward to becoming dignitaries in His kingdom. Three of the disciples (Peter, James, John) had been honored with special marks of favor; one of them (Peter) had been preeminently distinguished. A conversation kindled among the disciples about who is the greatest.

Three things warrant our attention concerning kingdom greatness.

- I. **Contention Concerning Greatness:** Verse 1 says, ***"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"*** This question is not a question of curiosity. We get a little more understanding of their reason for the question from the gospel accounts of Mark and Luke. From Luke 9:46, the disciples were disputing about which of them might be the greatest. From Mark 9:34, while they were on their way to Peter's house, they argued one with another about who is

the greatest. Notice both Mark and Luke say they disputed. The word “disputed” is *dee-al-eg’-om-ah-ee* means to discuss in argument. The question was not a curious question. Jesus drew the question out of them. Jesus asked them, “***What were you discussing on the way?***” They were striving among themselves for who would be the greatest.

The primary problem with a person striving for greatness is that it feeds one of mankind’s main problems, which is pride. The question of greatest was fueled by pride. As pride arises true greatness diminishes.

Proverbs 8:13 says, “***To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, even behavior and perverse speech.***”

Proverbs 11:2 says, “***When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.***”

Proverbs 16:18 says, “***Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.***”

Proverbs 29:23 says, “***One’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.***”

Pride breeds quarrels (Proverbs 13:10). The nature of human conflict is rooted in pride. The disciples were quarreling among themselves because of pride.

- II. Childlike Qualities:** Verses 2&3, “***And calling to Him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.***” Jesus used a child as an object lesson about what it means to be great in the kingdom. A child is not sinless.
- A. Childlike Obedience: Jesus called the child to Himself, and the child went to Him without hesitation or delay.
 - B. Childlike Dependence: A child absolutely depends on someone else to provide and protect him/her.
 - C. Childlike Faith:
Hebrews 11:6 says, “***Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whosoever would draw near God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.***” A child has total confidence in another for his welfare.
 - D. Childlike Humility: A child is not consciously humble; a child is humble by nature. The disciples were to become humble by deliberate choice.

Pride will not enter the kingdom of God.

- III. Challenge to Enter the Kingdom:** Verse 4 says Jesus’ response is a direct challenge to the disciples about whether they are going to enter the kingdom or not. In other words, don’t be so proud in considering which of you will be the greatest in the kingdom, you must first make sure that you are entering the kingdom at all! You may object because the disciples had already professed faith in Jesus, with Peter, speaking

on behalf of the other disciples proclaiming that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Christ, the living Son of God (Matthew 16:16). They had already demonstrated and were demonstrating their trust in Jesus by following Him wherever He went. Each of them had already gone out on a mission for Jesus, where they healed the sick and cast out demons (Luke 10:17). How could their salvation possibly be questioned? Simple. Salvation is not about doing; it is about being. It is not about what you do, but about being in a reconciled relationship with God. Jesus' statement to them was not only designed to challenge their pride but was designed to put their minds back on the more important things. It was designed to make sure they were going to enter the kingdom. The result would be a time of reflection and repentance for those disciples that were in the kingdom, and it was a call to salvation to those that were not in the kingdom. Who was not in the kingdom? Remember that Judas is also present.

Salvation comes when the Holy Spirit converts a man, and he comes to God in the humility and trust of a child.

Verse 5 ***Whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receives Me.*** The words "little child" does not simply refer to a child by age. It refers to all who have a childlike spirit and character. Receiving a humble servant in Christ's name is to receive Him. What is done to the little one, Christ regards as being done to Him.

Verse 6 ***But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believes in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*** Jesus gives warning concerning the treatment of those who belong to Him. The word "offend" is ***skan-dal-id-zo*** which means to cause to stumble, give occasion to entrap, to trip up, to entice to sin. To offend is so to trip as to be hindered in faith or to be turned out of the way.

Jesus holds people responsible for causing occasions of stumbling. Jesus said ***it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drown in the depth of the sea (ESV).*** The emphasis is on the type of death an offender will die. Heathen death, horrible death, one in which the body will not rise to the surface again.

