

Matthew 18:1-6: At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.⁵ Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

Intro: Commentator: [Referring to Matthew 18 – this is] the single greatest discourse our Lord ever gave on life among the redeemed people in His church.

Last Sunday we saw that Jesus is the God-Man Who knows all things (omniscient) & can do all things (omnipotent), but Who humbles Himself so that we might be free: free from sin & free to obey Him & free to win others to Him! We saw Jesus humble Himself last week & pay the tax that He didn't have to pay because He's the Son of the living God! This week we see Jesus expects those who follow Him to humble themselves like Him.

Jesus is the God-Man Who must be received in humility, like a little child, in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, and those who receive Jesus will love and serve the least and most insignificant of the children of God.

1. Jesus' Disciples Desire Greatness

Matthew 18:1: At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

a. Jesus' disciples once argued about who among them was the greatest: Mark 9:33-34: And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.

b. (A small investigation of why we desire greatness in a sinful way) Ever since the fall of mankind into sin, every heart of every person wants to be the greatest: Genesis 3:4-5: But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God"

No one and nothing is greater than God! We want to know all things & be in control of all things & call the shots!

c. This desire to be the greatest (pride) is central to every sin: 1) Violence/Anger: When Cain killed Abel, Cain wanted to be greater than Abel! He was angry because God regarded Abel's sacrifice and not his! So he killed him! Cain wanted to be the greatest! He wanted to be like God and take the power to kill into his own hands!

1 Samuel 2:2-3, 6: There is none holy like the LORD; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.³ Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed . . .⁶ The LORD kills and brings to life

We get sinfully angry (murder) because we don't get our way! We want to be God & make everything go our way!

2) Sexual Sin: God says sex belongs to Him! It is His idea, & He knows how best to enjoy it! So He says no sex before marriage; He says marriage is between one man & one woman; He says homosexuality is sin; He says He made man male & female; But we want to be the greatest! We want to be God! We want to do what we want!

3) Idolatry: Idolatry is loving anything more than God; loving anything as much as God; loving anything anywhere near as much as we love God! **Luke 14:26:** If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

But we want to be the greatest! We want to determine what and who is best for us to love first and foremost! We want to love and worship what we want to worship! (Jesus' basic call: deny yourself, take up your cross . . .)

John Piper: the chief pleasure of our fallen nature is . . . self-exaltation. Our sinful nature loves to be praised for what we are and what we have done.

d. God hates pride: Proverbs 16:5: Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished.

- **Proverbs 6:16-17:** There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes

Unbelievers: Do you see the pride of your heart? Do you see yourself in the disciples? Do you see the decisions that you make & the motivations to do what you do mainly revolve around you & not God and others? **GOSPEL!**

e. See Jesus' mercy in this text! The men Jesus chose as His ambassadors had this problem of sinful, worldly, proud ambition. They wanted to be the greatest! But see how Jesus tenderly, lovingly, and patiently teaches them!

2. Jesus Teaches That Everyone Must Turn & Become Like Children To Enter The Kingdom Of Heaven

Matthew 18:2-3: And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Child illustration)

Jesus calls a child to Himself and uses this child as an illustration of what we must be like in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. **Craig Blomberg:** This text should make us uncomfortable. The disciples' concern was "who is the greatest in the kingdom," i.e., which one of us is greatest. Jesus replies, "Unless *you* change . . . you will never enter the kingdom."

a. The necessity of turning & becoming like children: We must turn! We must turn from this desire to be the greatest! We must turn from trusting in ourselves & in everything else except God! We must turn from pride! We must turn from wanting to be God & having things our way! We must be born again! We must repent!

WSC 87: What is repentance unto life? A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

David Platt: To be a citizen of the kingdom, you must become a child of the King . . . you must turn from yourself and trust in the Father. Like a child, you thrust yourself upon God and confess your need for Him.

b. What does it mean to become like children? It doesn't mean children are innocent, pure, and sinless.

1) It means we must realize we are utterly dependent on God & we must utterly depend on God. 2) It means we must humble ourselves like Jesus and take the lowest place. It means we must die to the desire to be great! We must die to the desire to be important and significant! We must be willing to be rejected & despised – we must be willing to take the lowest position – to be unknown.

- **Craig Blomberg:** This humility cannot be a subjective attitude (children rarely act humbly) but an objective state (children do depend almost entirely on the adult world for their protection and provision).

- **R. T. France:** A child was a person of no importance in Jewish society, subject to the authority of his elders, not taken seriously except as a responsibility, one to be looked after, not one to be looked up to. To turn and become like children is therefore a radical reorientation from the mentality of the rat-race [to achieve significance] to an acceptance of insignificance . . . It is, then, the status of the child that is the point, rather than any supposedly characteristic quality of children, such as humility, innocence, receptiveness or trustfulness (and how many parents would regard at least the first two as characteristic of children?)

Essentially, to become like a child is to become like Jesus: 1) Jesus perfectly depended on His heavenly Father with a perfect trust and perfect reliance upon the Holy Spirit; 2) Jesus humbled Himself to the lowest position:

Philippians 2:5-11: Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did

not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he **humbled himself** and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

3. Jesus Teaches That Child-Like Humility Leads To Greatness In The Kingdom Of Heaven

Matthew 18:4: Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

When you humble yourself like a child: 1) When you utterly depend on & trust in God & 2) When you take the position of a child – this low, humble, insignificant position – when you cease to care about greatness in the eyes of the world – then you get the greatness of heaven & you are the greatest in the kingdom. Those who trust God the most & those who humble themselves the most – like Jesus did – they are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven!

R. T. France: True greatness is to be found in being little, true importance being unimpressive. That is what the kingdom of heaven does to the world's scale of values. *Humbles himself* does not refer to an arbitrary asceticism or a phony false modesty; it does not describe a character trait ([as if] children are “untempted to self-advancement” – really?), but the acceptance of an inferior position (as Jesus did, Phil. 2:8, where the same phrase is used).

Pray to become like a child! God must grant it! Matthew 11:25-26: At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."

Don't be afraid to take the lowest position: William Carey: While attending a British social function as he served as a missionary in India, a self-important British high ranking political officer sneered outwardly, intending to ridicule William Carey, in clear earshot of Carey, he said "Why Carey is just a shoe-maker!" To which Carey humbly replied, "Oh, no, sir. I am just a shoe repairman."

Ligon Duncan: Thomas a Kempis, the great medieval author, once said, “He is genuinely great who considers himself small and cares nothing about high honors.” And one Christian said, “Great men never know that they are great, but small men never know that they are small.” Great men are so given to doing what the Lord has called them to do, they never stop to think about their personal greatness. But small men are so wrapped up in themselves that they never realize that they are midgets. God calls us to that kind of self-effacing, self-forgetful quest for kingdom greatness which is utterly different than the greatness and success that the world offers.

4. Jesus Teaches That Those Who Receive Children In His Name Receive Him

Matthew 18:5: Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me

a. To “receive” means to welcome, love, serve, help, show hospitality to: We are to welcome such children Jesus is describing with open arms and with love and with compassion and meet their needs.

b. Who is the “one such child” Jesus’ disciples are to receive?

- 1) This child standing in their midst? We should love and serve children, but that’s not the main point.
- 2) Those who are the lowly, humble, and insignificant in society? Yes, but again, not the main point.
- 3) The lowly, humble, insignificant followers of Christ in the world: Jesus used an actual child as an illustration of what it means to be a true follower of Christ & enter the Kingdom: you must turn & be like a child and humble yourself like a child. Receive one such child as I’ve just described – those who are going to enter the kingdom.

- **Verse 6:** whoever causes one of these little ones **who believe in me**

L. Morris: Most commentators agree that the “little ones” include not only small children but all lowly believers.

c. This receiving should be done in Jesus' name: We should receive children & the small, unimportant, & insignificant in the world & especially in the church because Jesus does so & for the glory & honor of King Jesus!

d. To receive small, unimportant, & insignificant believers is to receive Christ Himself: Those who receive such people, when received in His name, receive Christ! Remember children were seen as small, unimportant, and insignificant – the very opposite of the greatest! Jesus says when you receive the smallest, most unimportant, and most insignificant in His name & for His glory – you receive Him!

Recent Church Visit (Steve): People spoke normally to us, but they were impressed when they found out I'm the pastor. There was a woman with a disability, maybe seemed to be overlooked: Steve – she should be most honored!

Matthew 25:37-40: Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?' ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Sinclair Ferguson: If it is still true today that your attitude to those who have no “standing” in society, reflects your attitude to the Lord Jesus, what kind of disciple are you?

If you want to measure the health of your relationship with God, consider how you are doing at loving the Christian brother or sister that you have the hardest time getting along with. We cannot say we love God and hate our brothers! (1 John 4:20)

e. The disciples (& we) must receive Jesus for Who He is: Remember Peter didn't want to receive Christ for Who He was – “No Lord! You will never suffer!” But Jesus came as the suffering servant of God!

Sinclair Ferguson: Jesus spoke in Aramaic. In that language the word for “child” also serves as the word for “servant” (like in French *garçon*). Was He saying: “It is only when you learn to receive me as the Servant of the Lord in my acts of humility, that you will really be submitted to God?”

f. You must receive Jesus in order to enter the kingdom of heaven: John 1:12-13: But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Matthew 10:40: Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

If you receive Jesus, then you receive God! Jesus is God!

5. Jesus Teaches That Those Who Cause These Believing Children To Sin Will Be Severely Judged By God

Matthew 18:6: but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

1) Jesus really loves His little ones (children who believe & lowly believers)!

L. Morris: We should understand Jesus to be referring to lowly disciples, those who claim nothing great for themselves but trust him for all things; they are God's little people.

2) Jesus really hates sin!

3) Jesus will severely judge those who cause His little ones to sin – those who deceive them and lead them away from Jesus! Drowning & death would be better than what they will face in hell forever!

Jesus came so that we might never face that hell! Oh the humility of the incarnation: God took on human flesh! On that cross Jesus was counted & treated as the smallest, the most unimportant, & the most insignificant so that we

could be saved! We must receive the bloody, humbled Christ by faith alone so that we might be saved from all our prideful sin! And God raised Him up from the dead to reign over all, & He poured out His Holy Spirit on His Church to help us turn away from pride and self and focus on Christ and on loving others.

Charles Spurgeon: It is ever the Holy Spirit's work to turn our eyes away from self to Jesus; but Satan's work is just the opposite of this, for he is constantly trying to make us regard ourselves instead of Christ. He insinuates, "Your sins are too great for pardon; you have no faith; you do not repent enough; you'll never be able to continue to the end; you have not the joy of His children; you have such a wavering hold on Jesus." All these are thoughts about self, and we will never find comfort or assurance by looking within. But the Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self: He tells us that we are nothing, but that "Christ is all in all." Remember, therefore, it is not your hold on Christ that saves you — it is Christ; it is not your joy in Christ that saves you — it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that be the instrument — it is Christ's blood and merits; therefore, look not so much to your hand with which you are grasping Christ, as to Christ; look not to your hope, but Jesus, the source of your hope — look not to your faith, but to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. We will never find happiness by looking at our prayers, our doings, or our feelings; it is what Jesus is, not what we are, that gives rest to the soul. If we would at once overcome Satan and have peace with God, it must be by "looking unto Jesus." Keep your eye simply on Him; let His death, His sufferings, His merits, His glories, His intercession, be fresh on your mind; when you wake in the morning look to Him; when you lie down at night look to Him. Oh! let not your hopes or fears come between you and Jesus; follow hard after Him, and He will never fail you!

Jesus Humbled Himself Small As The Servant Of All And Now Stands Tall As The Greatest Of All!

The disciples had a discussion on the way
The pride of their hearts it did betray
From the greatness of Christ they turned away
And when He asked "What?," they would not say
For they knew in their hearts they'd gone astray
Pride and envy are man's bad way
On your soul these vipers prey
Vipers within – their venom spray
"Grant death to self!" is what we pray
For our Christ came all pride to slay
Through death He'd take this sin away
And rise in victory the third day
To save our souls from self decay
Enable us to love display
And turn from self – give all away
So trust in Him and then obey
For He was humble – showed the way
And died and rose our pride to slay
So "Christ is all!" we would display!

If you want to be first, you must be last
So embrace with joy the lowest caste
Be servant of all regardless of class
Even to those sad, alone, and harassed
Then in God's sight as the first you'll stand fast
Because our great King took the greatest last
As Suff'ring Servant His love's unsurpassed
God spared Him no wrath, though He cried and asked
Then rose up alive – forgiving your past
Now rest in His love – an ocean vast!

A child is least they did believe
He said a child you must receive
In this a humble heart achieve
To all your pride you die and leave
To "Christ is all!" alone you cleave
For He was least, and He would grieve
Upon that cross God's wrath receive
And die with those who steal and thieve
Then rise your guilt to all relieve
If Him alone you would believe
He's greater than you can conceive!

Oh what a wonder – the incarnation
Where God made man His habitation
May it lead to worship and prostration
God became man in humble summation
Our Creator took upon Himself creation
To grant His people such a great salvation
As they nailed Him to the cross in utter degradation
He made their blood flow through heart circulation
He's the Servant beyond any explanation
Who humbled Himself beyond expectation
He's worthy of all our praise and adoration
For He rose the from grave – His Kingly coronation!

Christ Jesus Trust And Do Receive
Humbly Like A Child Believe
By This, True Greatness You'll Achieve
Heaven's Kingdom Joys Retrieve
No More Tears Or Pains You'll Grieve
For Jesus Died And Rose To Heave
All Sins Into The Sea He'll Leave
By Faith Alone All Wrath Relieved
We Love And Serve The Least Conceived
No Little Children We'll Deceive
But To Our Christ Like Babies Cleave
Our Whole Lives For Good He'll Weave
He Grants Us Pleasures None Conceive
He's God The Son We Praise Believe!

Jesus is the God-Man Who must be received in humility, like a little child, in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, and those who receive Jesus will love and serve the least and most insignificant of the children of God.