

## Greatness

**Mark 9:33-37** Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?"

<sup>34</sup> But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who *would be the* greatest. <sup>35</sup> And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." <sup>36</sup> Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, <sup>37</sup> "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

- Jesus' response to who is the greatest is if you desire greatness, you shall be last and the **servant of all**.

## Servant Leadership

This same passage from Mark is also in Matthew 18, with the exception of Jesus' summary statement.

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

- Jesus then answers that question through examples of servant leadership
- We know that all of chapter 18 is in response to the disciples' question of who is the greatest since there is no break and Chapter 19 begins:
  - **Matthew 19:1** Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, *that* He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.
  - So everything in between is one conversation – the answer to the question "Who is the greatest?"

## Jesus' definition of greatness:

### 1. Become like a child

- **Matthew 18:1-5** At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" <sup>2</sup> Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, <sup>3</sup> and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.
- Jesus could have pointed to Himself as the greatest. But instead, He points out a child.
- Unless you change and become like children. Innocent, pure, of small importance (especially in that culture).
- Specifically, Jesus says that the greatest must be as humble as a child.
  - Do not see yourself as great.
  - Dependent – Children rely on their parents for everything.
  - Willing to be seen as lower (sit at the children's table)
  - Not concerned with your own status.
- And willing to receive (accept) one as a child. The weak. The vulnerable. The helpless. Not just looking to surround yourself with others you consider great.
  - The world says to always surround yourself with people who are what you want to become.
  - As believers, it is important to have close relationships with those that will encourage and build us up, to forsake those that need us to be that for them is wrong.
  - Children will play with any other child.
- **We must be humble. Not only in the view of who we are, but also in who we consider "worthy" to serve with us, or for us to serve.**

### 2. Do not lead others into sin

- **Matthew 18:6-7** "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. <sup>7</sup> Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!
- No reasonable believer is probably purposely trying to get others to sin (well, at least up until 2020).
- But when we model sin in our lives, we push others to sin
  - "What a leader does in moderation, followers do in excess."
- When we get right up to the line, or play with sin we may cause others to sin
  - "Others may, you may not"
  - **1 Corinthians 8:13** "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."
  - Is there anything this world has that is so great it is worth sacrificing someone else?
  - Sacrifice is a sign of greatness.
  - But I want to do what I want to do. And there is nothing inherently wrong with what I want to do.
  - OK. But that's not the attitude Jesus says that the great have.
- When we compromise our beliefs to be liked or from fear of others opinions, we may lead others to sin.
- **It is very important to consider the effects that our behavior will have on others.** (While we do not preach PBA, this is about our relationship before others, not about our relationship with God).

### 3. Living a Life of Purity

- **Matthew 18:8-9** "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. <sup>9</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.
- This is pretty self-explanatory

- Living free from sin may mean sacrifice.
  - Perhaps in what we watch, listen to, who we are influenced by.
- Greatness is held to a higher standard.
  - 1 Timothy 3:1-13 lists the qualifications for being an elder or a deacon. And that list is primarily made up of sins that should not be present in their lives.
- It is the natural course of a believer that they should progress towards maturity. Part of that progress is living a blameless, holy life.
  - **Galatians 5:16** I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.
- **Greatness belongs to mature believers who have learned that sin only leads to death and they find more contentment in the spirit which brings life.**

#### 4. Prioritizing those that need help

- **Matthew 18:10-12** "Take heed that you **do not despise one of these little ones**, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. <sup>12</sup> "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, **does he not leave the ninety-nine** and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?"
- Take heed that you do not despise
  - A great person does not resent anyone that comes into their life.
  - Even if they are difficult. Or unlovely. Or not nice. Or just rub you the wrong way.
  - Especially if they are very needy. Little ones, children, have constant needs and demand our attention.
  - You will probably need to attend more to the needy and less to those that are capable of being left alone. In any group there are those that don't need as much attention and those that do.
    - That can be due to maturity OR seasons.
  - Go to the mountains – It's not always easy.
    - It takes time. Money. Patience. Seeing from a viewpoint other than your own.

- **A truly great believer looks to the needs of whomever is in their life, no matter what.**

## 5. Confronting Sin in Others

- **Matthew 18:15-17** "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that *"by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."* <sup>17</sup> And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.
- This is less about someone hurting you, and more about someone with a pattern of sin. (Forgiveness for sins that hurt you is next 😊)
- Confronting sin in others is hard.
- It is hard, but necessary. Sin does not produce life. It produces death. And the Bible speaks of sin as working its way throughout the entire church when left unchecked.
- **James 5:19-20** Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, <sup>20</sup> let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.
- Confronting sin is actually love. Which also means it should look like love.
  - **Galatians 6:1** Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.
- **We must be willing to confront sin in others, even when it is uncomfortable and scary. But it must be done in love.**

## 6. Forgive those that hurt you

- **Matthew 18:21-22** Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

- People, at some point, will hurt you. They may lie, disappoint, betray, say hurtful things.
- Also, people breaking commitments.
- And of course the world loves to hate Christians.
- But there are no qualifications on how much hurt, or what kind of hurt we are to forgive. Just forgive.
- For a full breakdown of this go to our YouTube channel and look for "Forgive as Christ Forgave You" June 1, 2025
- Jesus gives a parable that basically means that we have been forgiven an unimaginable debt impossible to ever repay. No one will ever sin against you to the degree that you have been forgiven. So the capacity is in you to forgive, because you have been forgiven.
- **Leaders forgive others regardless of the offense. And regardless of how many times the offense has been committed.**

**The disciples ask who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.**

**Jesus' response:**

- Become as children – Dependent, innocent, accepting, full of faith
- Accept the vulnerable
- Don't lead others into sin
- Live a life of purity
- Prioritize those that need help
- Confront the sin in others
- Forgive others.