

The Greatest in the Kingdom

Matthew 18:1-35, Part One

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I. Striving for Greatness (cf. 1 Cor 9:24-27)

II. The Greatest in the Kingdom

A. Question #1 – Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? (1 cf. Mt 20:20ff)

1. Answer – The one who humbles himself (2-4)

Jesus answers their question both illustratively and verbally. He reorients the disciples from a *self-centered focus* to a *God-centered focus*. He summarizes this God-centered focus with the word _____. The _____ of the child refers to the child's *identity*, *dependence*, and *calling*.

First, *identity*. Only those who know God as their Father enter the kingdom. The most important thing about you is not *what you do* but *whose you are*.

Second, *dependence*. He who is *greatest in the kingdom* is he who recognizes his complete dependence upon his Father. "*What do you have, that you have not received? And if you have received it, why do you boast?*" (1 Cor 4:7 cf. Pr 17:6)

Finally, *calling*. He who is *greatest in the kingdom* is the one who obeys his Heavenly Father, who places the Father's will above his own.

2. Warning A – Beware stumbling your brethren (5-9 cf. Mt 7:1-5)

"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Jesus' first warning is to beware *stumbling* your brethren *through your own* _____. The path to greatness is not found in being consumed with others' sins and failings but in dealing *first* with one's own failures and sins.

3. Warning B – Beware despising your brethren (10-20)

a. Don't despise your brethren (10-14 cf. Lev 19:16-18)

First, we are not to *despise* our brethren. Why not? Because God *protects* them and *loves* them. Consequently, our heart toward an erring brother is to be like the shepherd who leaves the 99 and pursues the one.

What does it mean to *despise* our brethren?

“You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” (Lev 19:16-18)

b. Do rebuke your brethren (15-20 cf. Pr 27:5-6)

“Open rebuke is better Than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

Jesus’ two warnings could be summarized in this way: after dealing with your own sin _____, deal with your brother’s sin _____.

B. Question #2 – How often shall I forgive my brother? (21)

Peter chose *seven times* to emphasize a *generous* but *measured* response to a brother’s sin.

1. Answer (22-34)

Jesus tells the story of the *unforgiving servant* who was forgiven an *immeasurable* sum and then refused to forgive a *healthy* sum. Jesus’ point is that no matter how grievously you have been injured or wronged by your brother, your injury is negligible *in comparison to* what you have been forgiven by God. Jesus wants us to reckon how much greater is our sin against God than our brother’s sin against us. If we are really dealing with our own sin *relentlessly* and our brother’s sin *compassionately*, then we will realize that we need to forgive our brother *seventy times seven*.

2. Warning (35)

He who will not forgive his brother will not be _____. God will cast the *unforgiving* man or woman into hell. If we refuse to forgive our brother, then God will not forgive us.

III. The Pathway to Greatness

What is the pathway to greatness? The *pathway to greatness* is to be humble like a little child – to *identify* God as our Father, to *depend* upon His mercy, and to fulfill our *calling* to obey Him. We fulfill this calling by dealing with our own sin _____ and our brother’s sin _____.

IV. Conclusion