

“Who is the Greatest?”

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Standard of Greatness

Who is the “greatest” person you ever met?

What was it about that person that made them great?

What standard does our culture use to define who is great and who is not?

- Power/Influence – money, fame, accomplishments

Matthew 18:1-2

The disciples finally got up the nerve to ask Jesus an awkward question, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Were they asking Jesus for the name of a particular person? They knew of Abraham, Moses, and now Jesus – who is the greatest? Or perhaps they were wondering which of themselves would be the greatest. While we are not certain what response they were looking for, we can relate to what their standard of greatness was.

What criteria do you think the disciples would have used to define spiritual greatness?

- Spiritual accomplishments and ability
- Obedience to the law

The Least of These

What does Jesus use as an object lesson for his disciples?

- A small child

What do you think the disciples thought Jesus could teach them about greatness from a child?

- Probably very little.
- They may have even thought he would use this child as an example of what greatness is not!

Why do children normally lack worldly greatness?

- They do not typically have all the accomplishments of adults to be viewed by adults as great.

In the first century, children were raised by the women of the household in the women’s living quarters. As best we understand, men had very little to do with raising their children until they were adolescents. Sons faced stern discipline and testing from their fathers to prepare them for manhood. Greatness would hardly be the term used for a small child like the one Jesus ushers into their midst.

You may look at the disciples and think they already acted like children at times but that is not what Jesus was talking about. *What word did Jesus say they had to do to become like children?*

- Change

This word literally means to turn or to change the position of something, in relation to something else.

How is humility similar to a change in position?

- Humility requires an attitude of making ourselves less.
- Humility is also a change in relation to something else – God and others.

How does God respond when we change our position and thinking of ourselves to a lower position?

- God then changes our humble position and makes us more than we ever could on our own.

Redefining Greatness

How does Jesus' statement about becoming like a child turn their expectation of greatness upside down?

- They thought greatness was based on performance and ability. Jesus showed them that the least able are the greatest.

Jesus doesn't answer their question with the name of some spiritually great person. Instead he reveals to them the pathway of how to live out kingdom greatness in their own lives. Jesus did this by redefining their view of greatness. He corrects our manmade view of greatness and shows us what greatness looks like from God's perspective. In God's eyes, total dependence on God's grace, is considered great.

Why is it that the least able and totally dependent are best equipped to accept God's grace?

- They know they could never achieve it in the first place.
- People with a great amount of natural talent are tempted to think they don't need grace.
- Children don't have clout. They don't have a long track record or resume.
- People the world sees as great have a bigger challenge to accept God's grace because what they have can more easily cloud their view of what is important.

How does this new view of kingdom greatness change the way we see people who are different or less able than ourselves?

- It makes us less judgmental and more gracious toward people society will have nothing to do with.

Matthew 18:5-6

Jesus so thoroughly identifies himself with those who are not able to fend for themselves: the helpless, the downtrodden, the “little ones” and insignificant of the world that he says welcoming them is like welcoming him. If Jesus were here in our midst, we would all gladly welcome him without hesitation.

What makes it difficult to welcome or help the “insignificant” ones of the world?

- You know you will never get paid back.
- It is humbling.
- You have to be unselfish.

Jesus is saying, once you learn how to help those who can never help you back, you have really learned what it means to be great in the kingdom. And once you learn to lower yourself in humility you are then ready to receive God’s gift of grace.

Application

What in your life has gotten in the way of being great in God’s kingdom?

What lessons have you seen in children that can help you be more godly?

What areas of your life do you still see the need for constant humility?

What “little ones” has God placed in your life that he wants you to be patient with?

Put it into Practice

This week try to help someone who is not able to help you back. I am not necessarily talking about helping someone with money. Help someone with your time and talents or by being present for them in a difficult time. Help someone who is maybe even just a little difficult to be around and you will find God will humble you in a profound way.