

Who Is The Greatest?

Matthew 18:1-5

MEMORY VERSE

MATTHEW 18:3

...“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

As many small prizes (stickers, pencils, etc.) as the number of children in your class.

As many 8.5”x11” sheets of paper and crayons or markers as the number of children in your class.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

Which of You is the Greatest?

Ask the class to decide among themselves which one of them is the greatest. Give them time to determine who is the greatest and why that person is better than the rest! See how many children would like to vote for themselves to be the greatest. A very real part of our human nature is the desire to be considered “the greatest.”

If the class comes to a consensus, reward the “greatest” with the privilege of passing out the small prizes to the rest of the children. If they have a hard time choosing someone you can designate someone to be the “greatest”. Then have them pass out the small prizes to the rest of the children. Explain to the children that we do not become the greatest by being the best looking, the strongest or even the smartest; we are the greatest in God’s kingdom when we become servants of everyone else. **Whoever humbles himself is the greatest in the kingdom of God.**

LESSON TIME!

When you think of someone “great,” who do you think of? Do you think of a hero, sports star, or maybe your mom or dad? What is it about these people that make them great in your eyes? How does that compare to what it is that makes Jesus great? How is it different from what the world likes to consider as great?

Today we are going to learn about what true greatness is in God’s eyes and that Jesus is the perfect example of greatness. We will also learn about humility and what it really takes to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. **Whoever humbles himself is the greatest in the kingdom of God.**

MATTHEW 18:1

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

This lesson begins with a question. This question was very important to the disciples and is important for us today. The disciples wanted to know who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. We see throughout the gospels that the disciples continually wondered who was the greatest. They knew that Jesus was building His new kingdom, and they wanted to know who was going to be His top man.

Of course every one of them thought that he would be the best candidate for the highest position. They often looked at their own talents or abilities and felt like they were the best man for the job. Sometimes they would even argue with each other as to who was the greatest.

Since they could not figure out who was the greatest, they came to Jesus and asked Him who the greatest was in His kingdom. They did not ask the question so they could learn how to do a better job

for Jesus. They wanted to know what their order of importance was to Jesus. They wanted Jesus to pick His favorite.

Maybe there have been times in your life when you felt like you were more important than someone else. But we will find out in our lesson today that Jesus looks at things very differently than we do. We may be very surprised at who Jesus calls the greatest in His kingdom and what is important to Him. **Whoever humbles himself is the greatest in the kingdom of God.**

MATTHEW 18:2

And Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them...

It is amazing how Jesus taught people. He did not answer their question right away; rather Jesus called a little child forward to stand in front of the big adults. The disciples must have wondered what in the world Jesus was doing. How could this small child have anything to do with finding out which of them was the greatest in His kingdom.

Jesus was giving them an illustration, a picture that would stick in their minds and hearts of the lesson that He desired to teach them. Jesus often used illustrations that were practical and simple. This time He used a little child, one little child standing in front of all these big, intimidating adults.

Now, we can remember from previous lessons that the disciples did not think much of children in their important ministries. In fact, Jesus had just finished teaching them a very valuable lesson about how He sees children when the disciples were trying to keep them away from Jesus. The disciples felt that Jesus was too busy for children. He was too important to be bothered by kids. But Jesus had to correct them of that wrong attitude. He told them, "Let the little children come to me." So now we see Jesus using a little child to teach the disciples another lesson about His kingdom.

What would it be like if you had to stand up in front of a whole bunch of adults? (Let the children answer.) No doubt you would feel kind of scared, and it would be a humbling experience. Jesus was using this child to prepare the disciples for an important lesson that He was going to teach them about being the greatest. Did you know that you can be used to teach others about God's kingdom? You certainly can! Jesus is going to teach His disciples that **Whoever humbles himself is the greatest in the kingdom of God.**

MATTHEW 18:3

...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."

Jesus tells the adults that in order to even enter the kingdom of heaven (let alone be the greatest) they would have to do two things. First they had to be converted. That means that there needs to be a change in their hearts. It is kind of the same as repenting. Repentance is having a change of heart toward sin. We need to see our sin as God sees it, ask for His forgiveness and turn from sin. We need to come to Jesus and be willing to allow Him to change our hearts.

Second, Jesus tells them that they must become as little children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. There are a lot of reasons why we must be like children in order to come to Jesus. One reason is that children admit more easily than adults that they sin. Children can place their trust in Jesus easier than adults. And children are not seeking the kingdom for their own selfish reasons (like greatness); they simply want to know Jesus. Jesus told them that if they did not change and become like a child, they could not go to Heaven.

(Explain to the class that as children, they have an advantage over adults when it comes to becoming a Christian. It is easier for them to trust in Jesus and accept Him as their Lord and Savior than it is for adults. Why do you think that is? Discuss this with your class.)
Whoever humbles himself is the greatest in the kingdom of God.

Mother, May I?

Have your kids stand up in class to play a game of “Mother, May I?” As your children become eliminated for not saying “Mother, may I?” have them sit down. The last child left standing is the winner.

You can play a couple of rounds of this game depending on your time. When you have completed the game, ask your children some questions about humility and submission. For example, “What did you need to do to stay in the game?”...say, “Mother, May I?” “What happened if you didn’t say, ‘Mother, May I?’” “...We had to sit down.” “When we do something wrong, what do we have to do to repent?” “...Ask for forgiveness.” “What happens if we don’t humble ourselves and repent?” “...We don’t have forgiveness.”

Explain to your class that we have to do things God’s way. Humbling ourselves before the Lord and asking forgiveness is the only repentance acceptable to God.

MATTHEW 18:4

“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus tells us why children are an example of the greatest in the kingdom of heaven:

1) Children are humble. They know they are not able to care for their own needs. They need someone wiser and bigger than

themselves. They know there is someone greater than themselves and they rely, humbly and naturally, on that someone.

2) Children are trusting. They naturally trust that their needs will be met. They know they are not their own providers. They simply trust in their parents to care for even their most basic needs. God wants us to simply trust Him. He is the only provider.

3) Children are giving. They naturally respond to the care they receive with an open heart of love. The Lord wants us to spend our lives simply responding to Him by loving Him completely and by loving others.

Children and adults should bow humbly before the Lord to receive His provision in each area of life. We are all needy and weak and in need of someone greater than ourselves. When we have that attitude of heart, we are counted great in the kingdom of God. **Whoever humbles himself is the greatest in the kingdom of God.**

MATTHEW 18:5

“And whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.”

Jesus now teaches the disciples that when we serve another Christian, we are serving Him. We especially need to serve the least of all people, like children, the poor, and the sick. When we reach out to another Christian, we are reaching out to Jesus. In fact when we do good to anyone in need, it is like we are doing it to Jesus Himself. (Read Matthew 25:40 to your class).

We Care About You

Have your class make greeting cards for the shut-ins in your fellowship, or the elderly at a local convalescent hospital. Fold an 8.5" x 11" piece of paper in quarters and let them draw and color pictures of people helping others.

Have them write a greeting on the inside of the card expressing that they care for and are praying for the person who receives this card. You may want to write a sample greeting on the board (for young children, you may want to pre-write the greeting on the inside and have them color and sign it).

MATTHEW 18:6

“But 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.”

The last thing Jesus warns the disciples about is that they need to be careful not to cause a child to sin. Jesus wants adults to be good examples to children. He is saying that we need to be good examples too. God takes it very seriously when someone tries to lead someone else into doing wrong or believing the wrong things. He wants us to point each other to Jesus.

The disciples learned a lot about being great in God's kingdom. And they learned it from a child:

- 1) To be great is to be humble.
- 2) To be great is to be trusting.
- 3) To be great is to be giving.

So greatness in God's kingdom is not about who is the most talented or looks the best or has the most money. It all has to do with who is the most humble, who is the most like a servant and who is the most like Jesus. So Jesus looks at greatness much differently than our world does today. We look at people who have done great things as being great. But Jesus reminds us that what makes anyone great in His kingdom is the attitude of the heart. If we are humble and trust in Him, we can also be great in His kingdom.

You do not have to do anything special or be a great missionary or anything else. Simply be obedient to Jesus and allow Him to work through your life in humility, and you can truly be great in the kingdom of God. Humility is not just thinking of yourself less than others; it is thinking and caring more about others. **Whoever humbles himself is the greatest in the kingdom of God.**

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to be good examples to their friends and families. Also have them pray for their parents. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.