Who Is The Greatest?

Zanesville, OH | September 8, 2019 | John Pollard | Sermon Notes

**Foundational Scripture:** Matt. 18:1-4; Mk. 9:33-37; 10:35-45; Lk. 9:46-48; 22:24-27

**Intro**:

* I keep track of most of the major sports and I listen to a couple of sports talk shows on a weekly basis. One question that keeps coming up time and time again in these conversations is: *“Who is the greatest?”* No matter how long it is talked about it just seems that a final decision can never be reached. Everyone has their own opinion and bias and thus it’s tough for all to come to a consensus on such a topic. The bible tells us that the disciples of Jesus debated among themselves about who was the greatest among them. Jesus would respond to their heated debate by making two striking illustrations. Jesus demonstrates that the one who is the greatest from His perspective and the perspective of God must do two things.

1. **Becoming a servant: Leaving self to become selfless (Lk. 22:24-27)**
   1. In Luke’s second recording of this argument between the twelve, they are bickering with one another about their physical preeminence no less on the last night they would spend with Jesus.
   2. Jesus, being the patient, enduring person He always was, sought to put an end to their bickering by once again opening their eyes to what they constantly seemed to miss in the 3.5 years they labored with Jesus.
   3. The greatest in God’s eyes are those who would become last of all and servant of all (Lk. 22:26-27). This came, no doubt, as a shock to them considering the kind of society they lived in.
   4. And Jesus, unlike everyone around them, did they very thing that would make Him great and greater than any man who ever lived! Jesus served. He was selfless. This was someone who didn’t just preach service, He did it Himself and led by example every opportunity He got (cf. Matt. 14:13-21; Mk. 10:35-45; Jn. 13:1-17).
   5. The bible paints Jesus as the ideal model for service and selflessness (Phil. 2:3-8) not merely as some posthumous tribute for the sacrificial act He did on the cross, but because He indeed was the complete embodiment of what it means to be a servant.
   6. Being the greatest depends on whether or not we want to become like Jesus. We need to deny self and think more about others. And when we do, we should not be looking for glory, compliments or rewards (it’s great if we get those things) but we should look for the day when God will exalt us!
2. **Becoming child-like: The marks of childhood (Matt. 18:1-4)**
   1. The second demonstration of what it means to be the greatest is to be like children. It is here in Matthew’s account that we come to the realization that Jesus has no concern with worldly standards of greatness. His response to the twelve is about being great in God’s eyes, being great in the kingdom.
   2. Jesus, being the masterful teacher He was, instructed the disciples not by theory but by example. Jesus utilizes a child to drive home the point of being the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus uses a child because they are simple, dependent, helpless, innocent and blunt.
   3. It is precisely those characteristics that we all need to have if we are to enter the kingdom. But it’s also these very qualities that make one the greatest in the kingdom. God desires people who depend utterly on Him and who submit to Him in every aspects of their lives.
   4. Jesus adds sort of a caveat to His message here in Matt. 18:1-4. Who is the greatest? Jesus’ answer is: The person who is willing to humble themselves. And that is hard! It is hard because of the way we are accustomed to think and the society we live in.
   5. Living in the world does not necessitate that we live like that world (cf. 1 Jn. 2:15-17) and that is the task at hand we all have to undertake. Willingness, effort, sacrifice, suffering and selflessness is what it takes. So, who is the greatest? The greatest are those who are willing to become like children and be last of all and servant of all. Anyone can do this with Christ (Phil. 4:13).

**Conclusion:** Many people have questions they don’t want the answers to. The disciples of Jesus may not have liked to hear what He had to say but whether they liked it or not wasn’t the point. The truth was spoken and it was up to them to obey it and do the things required or reject it and keep living like the rest of the world. Many people today have a desire to be different and to be saved. But we have to ask ourselves if we are going to allow our feelings and pre-conceived notions to get in the way of the truth and what really matters. God has spoken. The one who is willing to be humble and become like a child and a servant cannot only enter the kingdom but become the greatest in the kingdom!