

Kingdom of God - Week #4
“Who’s the greatest in the Kingdom of God?”

May 6, 2020

Dear Church Family,

May God give you grace and peace in these days of social distancing! Never forget that God is sovereign over all situations, and this one is no different! The words of the Apostle Paul in *1 Thessalonians 1:2-3*, express our hearts for you as our time apart continues, “*We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”^(NLT) As we continue to pray for you we would like any prayer requests you might have so we can update our prayer list. Please call, email, or mail in your requests, and we will work to publish a new prayer list for everyone next week. We hope you will find the sermon below a blessing and encouragement as we continue to multiply our worship in these days!

Thank you for joining us today on this **fourth week** after Easter 2020! We are pleased that you are choosing to worship with us today, and we want to wish a heartfelt “**Thank You**” to all the Mothers out there on this **Mother’s Day!**

Mom, you will always be an “essential person” in our lives, and that’s how God has designed it to be!

Whether we realize it or not, moms are often used by God to help demonstrate Kingdom principles to us day in and day out! We are going to talk about one of these today as we continue to spend our time learning from Jesus more about the **Kingdom of God**. We have been giving the **Kingdom of God** a priority over these last few weeks, because we are told this is the topic Jesus focused on teaching His followers after He had risen from the dead and before He ascended once again to the Heavenly Father.

Acts 1:3, records this for us.

³ *During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about **the Kingdom of God.***^(NLT)

This week, we are going to take up the question, “**Who’s the greatest in the Kingdom of God?**”

But, before we look at this today, let’s **pause for Prayer** and ask the LORD to continue to **reveal His Kingdom plans** for us as we **draw near** and listen once again.

Prayer

“Heavenly Father, thank You for everything that Jesus is teaching us about Your Kingdom. Help us to learn to live Your Kingdom values with our lives. We seek to live for You and to bring You glory with our lives. Help us to understand what it means to be “great” in Your Kingdom today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Who’s the Greatest? That is a question we have all asked at some time or another.

Everyone wants to be known as **the Greatest** at something, don’t we?

We may or may not be the Greatest yet, but we have this deep desire within us.

Who is the Greatest person you know?

Who is the “Greatest” person in your career field or office?

Who is the “Greatest” person in your church or on your team?

Who is the “Greatest” student in your school or in on-line school?

Who is the “Greatest” husband or wife...Dad or Mom?

Another reason everyone wants to know who **the Greatest** is, in the area of life they are interested in, is so they know what level they must shoot for to become one of the Great Ones, too.

Did you know that the Disciples also wanted to be the **Greatest** and they too wanted to know who **the Greatest** was?

Let's look at **Matthew chapter 18 verses 1-4** and we'll hear the Disciples ask about being "**the Greatest**," and we'll find Jesus' response to their question. In Jesus' response, He is going to teach us more about **the Kingdom of God!**

Matthew 18:1-4

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

*² Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. ³ Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. ⁴ So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is **the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.** ^(NLT)*

So, what kind of **Greatness** are the Disciples looking for?

They are looking to see "*Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?*"

That is not a bad thing to ask about, right?

I mean they wanted to know **who is the greatest in God's Kingdom**, surely that is a good question, right?

Well, kind of. If you read this same account in the **Gospel of Mark** (9:33-37) **and Luke** (9:46-48), you will discover that as the Disciples were traveling along the road to Capernaum, they had been arguing among themselves as to who was the "*greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.*"

They were actually arguing, **not** for **other** Great Bible Characters to be nominated, but "*arguing about which one of them was the greatest*" (Mark 9:34).

I think we would be accurate to surmise that they were NOT nominating each other. They were probably each claiming the title of "**the Greatest**" for themselves.

So, it comes down to their **motives and intentions** for asking the question, "**Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?**"

When they asked Jesus, the Disciples were **expecting** Jesus to name **someone**. Right?

They wanted Jesus to give them a name, so that they could begin congratulating themselves or comparing themselves to that named person.

Isn't that exactly what **we** do when someone is named as **the Greatest**?

We either congratulate ourselves if it is us, **or** we compare ourselves to that person and begin to make the case for why they are **not so great** and how we would have been **so much Greater** if it had been us.

Jesus knows all of that, and He knows that we are prone to thinking **selfishly**, so He answers their question in a different way. Instead of giving a name, Jesus describes **a type of person**. Look at **verse 4** again:

⁴ So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is **the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.**

I can hear the Disciples continuing the conversation saying, "So, Jesus, what you're telling us is that **more than one person** can be **the Greatest**?"

To which Jesus replies, "Yep, that is what I'm saying."

Jesus is trying to change their Kingdom mindset **from** one of looking for a **place** of power and privilege **to** one of becoming a **person** of surrender and humility. Jesus **didn't come** to hand out titles and power to people. He came to forgive sins, heal brokenness, and transform lives.

Listen again to what Jesus tells them, and hear how different it is from what the world tells us about **Greatness**.
Matthew 18:2-4

² Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. ³ Then he said, "I tell **you** the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. ⁴ So anyone who becomes as **humble** as this little child is **the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.** ^(NLT)

Don't forget that Jesus is answering His Disciples. His answer is directed at them three times with the word "YOU" being used in *verse 3*.

"I tell **you** the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven."

Jesus' Disciples **don't** get a free ride into the Kingdom of Heaven. Just because Jesus chose them as His followers **doesn't** excuse them from needing to **become** Disciples, not only in title, but in obedient actions and transformed lives.

Note, as well, Jesus **doesn't** say you need to be a **perfect** person and then earn a high college degree and then make lots of money and then marry the **perfect** person and have the **perfect** children to be considered **the Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven**. This is the view the world has as steps to greatness.

Jesus is teaching us quite a different view of **Greatness!**

Let's break it down so we can understand what Jesus is saying a little better.

Here are Jesus' steps to Greatness:

First, "turn from your sins..."

Why? - because He and we both know that we are **not perfect**, so why fake it any longer.

This is the starting point of **Kingdom Greatness!**

When we "*turn from our sins,*" we are, in essence, renouncing all of our own human prestige and status, and we are accepting the values of **the Kingdom**. We agree with God that the way we were living was in violation of His will, and we turn to accept His ways of living our life, which He designed.

When we "*turn from our sins,*" we also acknowledge that we have **no status** before God, expect **one of need**. We **all** come to Him as **sinners** in need of forgiveness. We cannot bring any of our own accolades to impress Him or earn His love or His forgiveness.

When we come to Him, we are solely **dependent** on the love and mercy of the Heavenly Father, and that brings us to our second point.

Jesus' **second step to Greatness** is "become like little children..."

Why? – because they are **humble**.

Please, **don't misread** this verse!

It does NOT say to be Child**ish**; It says to be Child**LIKE**.

The Disciples were already being **childish** as they argued in the back seat during their many road trips as to which one of them was “**the greatest.**” Jesus scolds their **Childish** behavior and tries to help them **mature**.

Jesus highlights for them one specific important aspect of being Child**LIKE**: **Humility**.

⁴ So *anyone* who becomes as **humble** as this little child is **the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven**.

What is Jesus talking about here?

How many of you had children who were born being humble?

Not Many I would guess...**Humility is something that must be learned.**

HUMILITY is the personal quality of being free from arrogance and pride and having an accurate estimate of one's worth.¹

Jesus did **not** use a child as an example because children are innocent of selfishness or because they are consistently modeling humility. We know from experience that neither of these things is true, so Jesus must have chosen a child to represent Humility in a different way.

Jesus was building on His first point about being dependent on the Heavenly Father's love.

You see, Jesus used a child because in Jesus' day “children had no status in society.” Children in that day were **not** pandered to like they are today. For Jesus' audience, “a child” represented someone truly humble and completely dependent upon others—perhaps even a burden at times. One commentator points out that members of an agricultural society—such as these living in first-century A.D. Palestine—viewed children as **consumers** rather than **contributors**. Very small children consumed resources, required constant attention, and needed to be protected.²

So, it seems Jesus uses the child to illustrate **humility** and **dependence**.

We are to come to God as a child does, in **humility** and **dependence**.

This **corrects** how we view ourselves as part of **the Kingdom of Heaven**.

We need to come to God **NOT** proclaiming how great we are, but proclaiming how great our sins are and how much we need His help. This is when Kingdom Greatness begins to develop in us.

As we do this, we begin to see how Childlike we truly are.

Here are 3 ways we are childlike:

We consume God's resources; He does not consume ours.

How many of your kids have ever accused you of eating “their” special food?

But in reality, the parent is the one who bought and paid for the “special food.”

We often treat God the same way with our time, talent, and money.

We treat them as “ours,” when they are all really given to us by Him.

Next, we begin to see,

We require constant attention.

¹ Hardin, G. (2003). Humility. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen & T. C. Butler, Ed.) (792). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

² Barry, J. D., Grigoni, M. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Mangum, D., & Whitehead, M. M. (2012). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Mt 18:2). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

As Christians we will mature and grow, but we will never get to the point where we are **not dependent** on the Heavenly Father. Never, for a moment think that you can do this life on your own! If you ever try life without God, it will ruin your life and maybe others. Stay dependent on the Father. One of the ways we remain dependent is to actively stay in communication with the Father through prayer.

Finally, we see that,

We Need to be protected.

We must never forget that we need the protection of the Father and His Kingdom. Remember a few weeks ago, we talked about the forces who constantly attack and fight against His Kingdom. We are **not** strong enough to fight off Temptation and Sin on our own. If we try to depend on our own strength, the Devil will eat us for lunch. We need the Protection of the Father and His Kingdom if we are going to survive and thrive in this world.

All of this and more, the Heavenly Father is willing to do for us if we will come to Him in the **humility** and **dependence** of a **child**.

Just as the children of Jesus' day were at the mercy of the adults, so Jesus is trying to teach the Disciples (and us) that we are dependent on our Heavenly Father's love and mercy, so we should come humbly to Him.

Jesus says that "unless" we do these things "*you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.*"

So, this is a very important lesson Jesus is teaching us!

Greatness in the Kingdom comes by being **humble** and **dependent** on God.

This call to humbleness wasn't a new teaching. It was what God had always required of His people.

Micah 6:8

⁸*No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good,
and this is what he requires of you:
to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk **humbly** with your God. (NLT)*

Moms, I believe you often model **Kingdom Greatness** to us. I know Jesus used a child to illustrate His point of how **Kingdom Greatness** starts, but I believe moms embody the maturity of what it means to live out **Kingdom Greatness**. In **Mark 9:35**, Jesus tells His Disciples what mature **Kingdom Greatness** looks like, "*Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else.*" (NLT)

Moms, the way you live out **Kingdom Greatness** is a testimony to us all that it can be done, and that there is great honor for those who live this way...because today is Mother's Day, and we are honoring you!

Mom, you never go around proclaiming your greatness, you just live out your humble service to God and others.

Mom, you are always putting other's needs above your own.

Mom, you do what is right even when it is not comfortable or easy.

Mom, you demonstrate loving mercy to your children over and over again.

Mom, you have modeled walking **humbly dependent** on God day in and day out as we have heard you pray and seen you live.

Moms, part of what we are celebrating today is our gratefulness for the way you have genuinely modeled **Kingdom Greatness** to us!

I have some Good News for you today,

You, too, can become one of **the Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven!**

Jesus said...*anyone*...

⁴ So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is **the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.**

We all want to be **Great**, so why not become Great where it really matters most?

You can be considered “**one of the Great ones,**” if you will do what Jesus has said and repent and become humble.

Remember, Jesus isn't looking for a particular position to be filled, He is looking for us to become **a certain type of people**; a humble and dependent people before God.

Did you know there is a promise from God when we choose to humble ourselves?
It's found in the verses that we opened this year with.

James 4:6b-10

*As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but **favours the humble.**”*

⁷ So **humble** yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. ⁹ Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. ¹⁰ **Humble** yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in **honor.** (NLT)

Wow! Imagine what it would be like to be **favoured** by God because you are **Humble**.

Imagine the **closeness** of God when we draw close to Him with the proper attitude of humility and dependence. Imagine how it will feel to be **honored** by Him, for He promises if you will “*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.*”

Let's go and be **the Greatest in the Kingdom** by being humble and dependent on God as we serve Him and others.

Blessing – May God favor and honor you as you humble yourself before Him!

Please remember these other ways we are reaching out as a Church Family in these days of separation.

Church Phone: 724-628-3949

Church E-mail: centralfellowshipchurch@verizon.net

Church Website: www.centralfellowshipchurch.com

Church Facebook page: www.facebook.com/centralfellowshipconnellsville

NEW Church YouTube channel: Search for Central Fellowship Church or

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ5mrAnoy6Bhe4UwtyICQ8g>

Love and Prayers for you all!

Following Christ,

Pastor Mike Martin