

Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ Greatest in the Kingdom

Last time...an issue of taxes and patriotism: the Temple tax

Jesus Christ is the Son of God
Temple tax-exempt
greater than the Temple
King of kings and Lord of all nations

The children of God are believers/disciples/followers of Jesus Christ
true patriots, withholding the outburst of lawlessness
removed before the traitorous Antichrist is revealed

- by their apostasy/falling away
- by their Bridegroom via Rapture (1 Thes 1:10)

Encourage all to carefully, thoughtfully review last week's message to understand the shadow of the Church presented in Numbers because the great falling away of 2 Thes 2 is here in these days of deception

This time...we join the discussion/dispute among the 12 disciples:
Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

We will be in Matt 18, Mark 9, and Luke 9

Matt 18

v1 Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven:
At the same time...
Peter returned from fishing and paying the temple tax for him and Jesus...
the disciples ask Jesus a general and seemingly innocent question:
Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

That must be a rhetorical question, for what is the obvious answer?
The King!

The Lord God is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Ps 10:16)
So that must not really be their question

Let's go to the parallel passages, starting in Mark 9

Mark 9

v33-34 disputed among yourselves...held their peace:

The account of the temple tax issue upon Jesus and the disciples' return to Capernaum...and Jesus' Divine way of handling of it... is only in Matthew's gospel, written to the Jews.

And afterwards, Jesus is in the house (no doubt Peter's) and the disciples ask their disguised question

Here in Mark's account, Jesus responds, not with a "Divine policy statement" but with a question, an informed and probing question

He asks the 12 what they were disputing/discussing among themselves as they journeyed from the region of Mount Hermon and through the Galilee to Capernaum
(And apparently they are still at it in Peter's house in Capernaum!)

Their answer is: silence...they do not answer Jesus' question

The answer is: The 12 were arguing among themselves as to which of them was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven

Why is their answer silence?

Because Jesus saw thru their "innocent", disguised question...

He knew what they have been arguing about

And they were ashamed and embarrassed, conscience-stricken by Jesus' knowing and revealing question

After Jesus had point blank told them that He would suffer at the hands of the religious leaders and die (and be raised again the 3rd day, the part they seem to have selectively not heard or misunderstood), they were arguing among themselves about their own personal merits and future greatness/status

After Jesus spoke to them about being the Servant of God
(Matt 16:23-25),

they started to bicker about their importance and being served;
After all, the lesser serves the greater, right?!

The Self-less heart/nature of Jesus (Son of Man) Whose focus is on His Father in heaven, stands in stark contrast to the selfish and self-serving heart/nature of His disciples (man), whose focus is on themselves as they are comparing and competing with each other

Why would they be having this discussion/debate?

1. It is what they have been taught by their religion
The Rabbinic and Pharisaical Judaism religion was filled with
“ranks” of people, based on learning/knowledge level,
merit/works, favoritism
This line of thinking is deeply rooted in them (e.g. Matt 20:20-21)
2. They are thinking carnally, in the flesh vs in the spirit,
about recent events
 - Matt 16:18-19 to Peter; not yet understanding this
 - PJ&J only taken up the high mountain (Hermon)
 - The 9 unable to cast out the mute demon
 - PJ&J having sealed lips about what happened on that
high mountain
 - Peter being used to pay the temple tax for Jesus
 - (“What about our temple tax?” not having grasped their
tax-exempt status)

So some are feeling more important than the others (puffed up) and
some are feeling insignificant/lesser compared to others

Are their “ranks” of followers of Jesus?

No, all are children

Does our merit or works make us more acceptable to God?

No, we are acceptable to God only by the merit and work
of the Son of God

Does Jesus play favorites?

No, PJ&J are being prepared for their future callings

Busted and their real question revealed by Jesus, the 12 are ashamed before their
Master for their self-centered competition

Now to the other parallel passage, in Luke 9

Luke 9

v46-47a a reasoning...perceiving the thought of their heart:

Again, there is a reasoning/debate among the 12 disciples...
an on-going topic of discussion

They ask Jesus a general question that they hope will answer their real question

- Not, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of God
- But, Which of them is the greatest in the kingdom of God

A foolish attempt to cover up what they were really digging for because Jesus has repeatedly shown them and the Pharisees etc that He knows the thoughts of men (thereby proving His Deity)

1 Chron 28:9

Ps 94:11

Prov 15:26

Pride and jealousy are brewing in His camp, ugliness is rising in the hearts of the 12; Jesus knows it, and deals with it immediately

v47b-48 child...in My name...he that is least...shall be great:

Jesus did not rebuke the 12, He seized the teaching moment to teach them about “greatness”

In Peter’s house, the Lord loving uses a “little child” to instruct the silent, conscience-stricken disciples about their real question (which is not recorded in Luke’s account)

Whosoever shall...makes that choice vs God made that choice for them receive...accepts, take unto them

this child...a young child, a toddler or pre-school age

in My name...all-important qualifier: in My character

receives Me...accepts Me, takes Me unto them

Him that sent Me...to receive the Son is to receive the Father for...because

he that is least among you...small in worldly measure, as

a. child vs adults

b. Jesus vs men

Is 53:3-4

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

the same shall be great...big, mighty and strong, by God's measure, as

- a. a little child is great in God's eyes
- b. Jesus is great in God's eyes

Phil 2:7-11 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Great in the kingdom of heaven:

- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the humble Servant of God
- little children

Let's go back to Mark 9 to get more details about the greatest in the kingdom of heaven

Mark 9

v35 desire to be first...last of all and servant of all:

The 12 are sitting there, ashamed and holding their peace, knowing that Jesus knows the real question they have been arguing about
This is Mark's account of this teaching moment

If any man desire...prefers, determines, sets his mind to be to be first...chief, highest ranking, foremost above others, MIP, MVD shall be last of all...subordinate, lowest among others
servant of all...attendant of all, waiter/busser of all, servant of all (no self-will)

Counter-culture teaching!

In the world, the way up is on the backs of others who are weaker

In the kingdom of heaven, the way up is down

In the world, the winner is the first

In the kingdom of heaven, the winner is the last (Matt 19:30)

In the world, leaders are served

In the kingdom of God, leaders are servants of all

Then to illustrate that point...

v36-37 took a child...receive one such as:

Jesus took a "little child", a young child, and set him in their midst, so all could see him

Then Jesus took the little boy in His arms, gently and lovingly embraced him, and said

to receive...accept, take unto them

such a child...young, little

in My name...in My character (the all-important qualifier)

receives Me...speaking of a likeness with such a child

receives Me receives not Me...the Servant of God, Servant of all
(no Self-will)

but Him that sent Me...God the Father

in Gospel of Mark (Jesus is Servant of God)

"If you will be like this child...if you will accept being like this child...
you will accept Me (nature/character) and the Father Who sent Me."

John 6:28-39, 38

What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me

Jesus is teaching His disciples and us

- where the Creator wants us to be – in His arms
- how the Creator wants us to be –
 - genuinely innocent (vs false)
 - pure of the world's corrupt ways
 - teachable and full of questions
 - trusting, always hungry, eager to be "eat"/believe Him

What does our Creator require?

Faith and humility

Micah 6:8

He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Not let's go back to Matthew's account of this very important teaching moment

Matt 18

v2-3 converted and become...shall not enter:

In this Gospel, written to the Jews, Jesus, in this very important teaching moment, first speaks of the condition of entering the kingdom of heaven before answering the “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven”

I say unto you...Thus says the LORD

Except...unless

ye be converted...you (plural) turn, reverse course, repent and become...be like, become like as little children...

- humble
- respectful
- obedient
- thankful
- submissive
- teachable
- trusting/believing
- dependent
- innocent
- pure
- care-free
- unassuming

ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven...The Kingdom is “For Children Only”

Deut 1:39 your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it.

The first issue Jesus addresses is one that must not be assumed (as it was in both the disciple’s disguised and real questions) is the condition for entering the Kingdom of heaven in the first place (Universalism is a lie from pit of hell)

converted return to...pre-fall state of purity and innocence
John 1:11-13...”power” vs “right” (we have none)

from independent (our nature, world’s teaching)
to dependent (God’s teaching)

Then Jesus answers their question(s)

v4-5 humble himself as this little child...greatest in the kingdom:

Therefore, in v3, Jesus was speaking of an unspoiled child,
a child raised in God's ways

Few things are more irritating than a spoiled child!

Indulged, disobedient, disrespectful, wild, and uncontrolled

The Condition for entry into the kingdom of heaven is to be converted into
an unspoiled child;

spoiled children must also "become as little children"

To receive...accept, take unto them...an unspoiled child

in My name...in My character (the all-important qualifier)

receives Me...accepts, takes unto them the Son of David the King, Messiah,

The Greatest in the Kingdom (Gospel of Matthew)

Application

Together, the 3 Gospels that record this very important teaching moment present one "answer" to the question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Matthew: whosoever will **humble** himself as a little child

In the eyes of God, "greatness" comes by humility

James 4:6, 10 God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up

Eph 2:6 hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly
places in Christ Jesus:

Luke: he that is **least** among you...small in the world's measures but strong in God's
measures

In God's eyes, "greatness" comes by faith and humility

Mark: **last/lowest** of all, **servant** of all

In God's eyes, "greatness" comes by serving all, by being a servant of all

The right motive is not to determine to be humble, least, last in order to be ranked first

This is a false motive, where the end is unchanged but the means are

The right motive to be humble, least, last is to make

Jesus first
others next
Self last

Serving Jesus

- regardless of the cost or inconvenience
- no matter how seemingly insignificant, for nothing is (1 Cor 15:58)

Serving others, even if they

- take advantage of you
- despise and reject you
- esteem you stricken

(the Lord does not forget the cry of the humble, Ps 9:12)

and NOT serving Self but rather making Self last

“Not my will be done but Your will be done.”

This is “**in My name**”, in His character (key phrase in the teaching)

- faith (Heb 12:2)
- humility (Matt 11:28-30)
- least (Luke 21:17)
- last (Matt 16:24)
- Servant of all (Rom 5:9, Phil 2:5-8)

This is “greatness” in the kingdom of heaven

This is Jesus Christ in us and us in Him

We all know by experience and by the revelation of God: God is great, man is not

For a person to be great, God must be great in the person

- faith-full
- humble
- least...small in the world’s measures
- last/lowest...deny Self
- servant of all

The Greatest (Jesus) served the least (you, me)

For His greatness to be seen in us,

- secular, worldly, carnal thinking must be replaced with spiritual thinking
- worldly ambition that does not bear fruit pleasing to the Father must be subjugated to the will of God

This is to say, for a person to be great they must become like Jesus Christ...

must be converted, our nature/character to His

It is natural to want to be great, first...pride
supernatural least, last...humility

The natural must be converted to the supernatural

Pride must be broken and humility received

[Humility]

John 3:30	I (Matt 11:11) must decrease, He must increase
Rom 12:1-3	living sacrifice, not conformed, transformed, not think more highly
Rom 15:1	strong bear weak, not please ourselves
John 15:13	greater love has no man than this
1 John 3:16	He laid down His life, we lay our lives down for brethren
Matt 16:24	for many people: losing their religion (source of spiritual pride)

Let's keep God's perspective:

World: temporary, fleeting like a vapor (our lives so much more so!)
 Kingdom of heaven: forever, without end

What "scores big" in the world is despised by God...Whose kingdom is forever
 What "scores big" with God is despised by the world...which is passing away

There is "tension" between God and the world
 Who wins?

Therefore, it is reasonable to choose to follow/be like Jesus vs the world

- faith-full
- humble
- least...small in the world's measures
- last/lowest...deny Self
- servant of all

Do you want to grow in your walk/relationship with the God Who died for you and purchased you with His own blood?

Serve in the Children's Ministry
 Teach the little children...be taught by the little children

Jesus teaches us
 We teach our children
 Our children teach us (one of the reason God gives us children)

Let's not be spoiled brats, let's be children of God!

Am I willing to humble myself and do the least of things for Jesus and for others?
 Am I willing to humble myself and do anything for Jesus and others?!