

Review

In chapter 17, we saw two instances where Jesus spoke with fewer than all twelve disciples. First, Peter, James, and John were invited to pray with him on the mountaintop, and most recently, Jesus had a conversation with Peter about the temple tax.

Apparently, this led up to an argument. When the twelve were together, they were discussing among themselves as to which of them was the greatest (Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46). When confronted with Jesus' question, "What were you guys discussing?" they came clean and asked Him outright...

18:1 Who Is The Greatest?

"Okay, Lord. We want to know: Who is the greatest?" How utterly sad to be focused on such a thing! And yet, people continue to be centered on this specific matter today.

- Who gets the most attention?
- Who has the best name recognition?
- Who's the most famous?
- Who has the most influence?
- Who gets the best seat?
- Who does everyone scramble to serve?
- Who gets all the opportunities?
- Who gets the call first?
- Whose face is the most recognizable?

Jockeying for position, putting yourself first, being self-centered, establishing yourself as the leader... How completely pitiful!

My instinct would be to say, "Every one of you get out of here! You haven't learned a single thing from me!" But Jesus doesn't lose His temper. He demonstrates what Paul later wrote,

2Tim. 4:2 ...reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

18:2-4 Humble Like A Child

Jesus' lesson was a visual one. He sat down (Mark 9:35), called out to one of the little boys (Matt 18:2), and took him in His arms (Mark

9:36). He looked up at the disciples and said, "Who's the greatest in the kingdom? Guys, this is your example right here. Unless you turn around (Gk: STREF-o) and become like this, you're not going to enter the kingdom of heaven."

Now, I have heard many sermons based on this statement which were preached on the attributes of children. "Jesus tells us we need to be innocent like children...", "We must have unconditional faith like a child...", "We need to have this quality of childlikeness..." But they're just pulling these concepts out of a hat. Frankly, I sometimes wonder why I've never heard, "We need to be short like a child, or we won't make it to heaven...", or "We need to be selfish with our toys like a child, or we can't be saved..."

In reality, Jesus is painting a clear picture about one certain childlike attribute: Humility. We are to humble ourselves. "Tap-i-NO-o" in Greek literally means "to stay low, not to lift yourself far from the ground." We are to be making ourselves lower than others, not higher. We are to be honoring others, not ourselves.

Do you remember being a child in the midst of adults? You weren't under the impression that you were the boss. You weren't thinking, "I am so much smarter than these grown-ups here. I can do the job so much better. I am clearly more qualified to lead than any of these big people here." (Remember, Jesus is holding an child, not a teenager!)

Saints, the greatest in the kingdom are those who humble themselves and esteem others greater than themselves:

Phil. 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves

I am so tired of the conflicts between Christians: "Why didn't you pick me? Why haven't you honored me? Why wasn't I the one who was considered greatest?" I'd like to say, "Grow up!" But in truth, growing DOWN is the way to fix this: Humble yourself to the level of a child.

There are lots of reasons why we fail to apply this. "Frankly, I can't lower myself because I'm so much more qualified than these other people are." "If I let those other people get recognized above me, they will get more success and recognition than I will!" "If I lowered myself, these oth-

ers would think that they are better than me!"

You think these things are unrealistic? They are all thoughts that I had recently about a situation. You see, God doesn't let me teach things without having to live them first. Awhile back, I was asked to do something quite notable, but then things fell through. A couple months down the road, I learned that instead of me, someone else less qualified, less gifted, was put in the position that I had originally had! I was livid! I was in a bad frame of mind for over an hour before the Lord spoke to me very clearly:

James 4:6 ..."GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

"But God, it would have been so much BETTER if I'D gotten to do it!"

Rom. 12:3 ..."I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think..."

"But God, this was a big thing for me! Do you know what it would have meant to me?"

1Pet. 5:6 ...humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time

"But do you realize what I'm going to listen to as this person revels in their good fortune?"

Rom. 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice...

"But God, now they're going to think that they're better than me!"

Phil. 2:3 "...with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves"

"Okay, I get it."

I got over it. And today, I rejoice with the person who has been exalted. I have prayed for them, and hope that they succeed greatly in this. I'm not secretly hoping that they fall on their face. In all honesty, I will be elated if they do well, and it would crush me if they failed, because I have invested so much prayer in them for this.

Here's the scoop, saints: if you're proud and envious, you're miserable. But when you rejoice with humility, there is so much peace, it's indescribable.