

I am the Greatest

Mt 18:1-4

INTRODUCTION

- A. Illustration about woman saying she was proud, for she admired her beauty in the mirror for an hour, *Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations*, #10170.
 - 1. We often boast of things when we ought to keep our mouths shut--we boast about how good our children are before they are imprisoned for drug dealing, we boast of how nice our home is before it burns to the ground.
 - 2. We need to be so careful about pride.
 - a. Prov 16:18.
 - b. Js 4:6.
- B. The disciples were humans, and as humans they boasted of things when they should have kept their mouths shut. Let's examine an episode of their pride that we might learn to be humble.

THE ARGUMENT OF THE DISCIPLES, v 1

- A. "The disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'"
 - 1. Luke's account tells us that a "dispute" arose among the disciples as to which was the greatest (Lk 9:46).
 - 2. Why were the disciples arguing about who would be the greatest?
 - a. The disciples still thought of the kingdom as an earthly one--they did not yet realize it was a spiritual kingdom.
 - b. Because the disciples thought of the kingdom as earthly, they thought people would occupy positions of power & prestige in the kingdom.
 - c. About ten days before this, Jesus had honored three of his disciples.
 - 1) He gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 16:19).
 - 2) Peter, James, & John had been taken to the top of a mountain to witness Jesus' transfiguration (Mt 17:1-3).
 - d. All of this came about to cause their arguing & wrangling amongst themselves as to who the greatest would be.
- B. Illustration about Adlai Stevenson asking a cab driver if he thought he spoke over the heads of the average man, *Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations*, #957.
 - 1. Let us not think that we are better than others.
 - 2. Are you thinking you are better than others?

THE ANSWER OF THE CHRIST, vv 2-4

- A. Jesus told the disciples, "Unless you are converted . . ., you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."
 - 1. The word for "convert" actually means to turn--Jesus was telling the disciples that they had to turn, they had to repent.
 - 2. The disciples were not behaving as they should.
 - a. Instead of moving toward the kingdom of heaven, they were moving away from it.
 - b. The pride & the lust for power the disciples felt were not part of God's plan for his kingdom.
 - 3. Those who want to enter the kingdom of heaven must turn, they must repent.
 - a. The behavior of this world is inconsistent with the behavior expected of those in the kingdom of heaven.
 - b. Have you given up the behavior that is inconsistent with the kingdom of heaven?

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- B. Jesus called a little child, set him in the midst of them, and told the disciples that unless they became as this little child they would not enter the kingdom of heaven.
1. This episode more than likely took place at Peter's house (cf Mt 17:24-25), so this child could very well have been Peter's, but that's conjecture. The different theories about who this child was miss the entire point Jesus was trying to make.
 2. When Jesus called this child to him, the child demonstrated exactly what Jesus meant.
 - a. The child trusted Christ.
 - 1) He sensed the openness, warmth, care, and love of Christ.
 - 2) Children are often so trusting--they'll believe anything you tell them.
 - b. The child surrendered himself to Christ.
 - 1) He was willing to give up what he was doing and go to Christ.
 - 2) He could very well have been playing with his favorite toy, but when Christ called him he came to him.
 - c. The child was obedient to Christ. He obeyed & did exactly what Christ requested.
 - d. The child was humble before Christ.
 - 1) All the above traits show humility.
 - 2) Children do not want to be placed in the midst of a group of adults, for they prefer to be in the background, away from staring, gawking eyes.
 - 3) It is only as they grow older that they begin to desire the limelight, wanting prestige & honor.
 - e. This child sets a good example for us--he trusted Jesus, surrendered himself to Jesus, obeyed Jesus, and humbled himself before Jesus. Do you need to begin following the example of this child?
- C. Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, v 4.
1. Jesus here answers the question the disciples asked in v 1. This answer must have disappointed the disciples, for Jesus told them that greatness did not come through positions of honor or authority; greatness comes through humility.
 2. Humility is, without a doubt, the most important quality for a Christian.
 - a. Without humility, one cannot serve God.
 - b. His pride will get in the way & he will not be able to surrender himself to the will of God. He'll say things like:
 - 1) "I don't have time to pray"--which means: "My pleasure & enjoyment are more important than spending time with God."
 - 2) "I can tell this little lie"--which means: "I don't want someone to know what I really did."
 - 3) "I can drink as much beer as I want"--which means: "I know more about what's good for me than God does."
 3. So many Scriptures call upon us to be an humble people.
 - a. We can follow the example of Jesus who "being found in appearance as a man, . . . humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil 2:8).
 - b. Js 4:10.
 - c. Have you humbled yourself before God?