

# The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven

**Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48**

**DIG:** What topic were the apostles discussing and debating? How did Jesus settle their dispute? What quality did He call for? According to Messiah, who is great in the eyes of ADONAI? What does it mean to humble oneself like a **child**? Why do you think this is important for Yeshua's **Kingdom**? How did the Lord illustrate the importance of **lowly** and **forgiven** people like **children**?

**REFLECT:** Why do we get so full of ourselves so often? What happens when you start comparing yourself to other people? Describe humility and give some examples. Our society is a bit different from the ancient Roman Empire. What are the dominant values that our neighbors and colleagues live by? Why is it so difficult to remember to treat others with dignity and respect? What are the dangers of pride?

**After the second time Yeshua predicted His death** (see *Ge - Jesus Predicts His Death a Second Time*), **the talmidim responded with pride and misunderstanding**. Nothing shows so well how far **the Twelve** were from understanding the real meaning of **Jesus'** messiahship than this incident. **He** had repeatedly told **them** of what awaited **Him** in Yerushalayim. Yet, it was clear that **they** were still thinking of **Christ's Kingdom** as an earthly one, and of **themselves** as **His** ministers of state.

**They came to Capernaum** and an **argument** broke out among the **apostles**. There is something heartbreaking about **Messiah** going to the cross and **His talmidim** arguing about **who was the greatest**. In their heart of hearts, however, **they** knew **they** were wrong because **when Yeshua was in the house and asked them: What were you arguing about on the road?** **they** had nothing to say. **But the apostles kept quiet because on the way they had argued among themselves about who was the greatest** (Mark 9:33-34; Luke 9:46). **They** had no defense. It is interesting how things take their proper place and its true character is seen when it is set in the eyes of **Jesus**.

As long as **they** thought that **Christ** was not listening and that **He** had not seen, **the argument** seemed fair enough, but when it was exposed to the presence of **the Master** it was suddenly seen in all its unworthiness. If we spoke and acted as if in the presence of **the Lord** it would make all the difference in the world. Before acting if we asked ourselves, "Could I go on doing this if **Jesus** was watching me?" Or if we asked, "Could I go on talking like this if **the Lord** was listening to me?" there would be many things we would be saved from doing or saying. And if the truth were known, for believers, everything we do and say *is*

in **His** presence. **The Spirit** convicts us of sin and reminds us to abstain from using the words or doing the deeds that we would be ashamed of if **He** should hear or see them.<sup>895</sup> You can probably hide from your dad, and maybe even from your mom, but you can't hide from **Jesus**.

This section comes after **Messiah** had arranged for **Peter** to pay **Peter's** Temple tax as well as **His** own (**Matthew 17:25**). **Peter** probably thought he was special. Like, **the Lord** had something "special" for him! And **He** did. **Peter** was crucified upside down on a cross. Somehow I don't think that's what **Peter** had in mind. In addition, this incident came after the transfiguration in which three of **the apostles** were allowed to see **the King of kings** in all of **His** glory and the rest did not. At any rate, an **argument** broke out.

At that time the talmidim came to **Jesus** and asked: **Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:1)?**" **Matthew** uses the kingdom of Heaven because **he** is speaking to a Jewish audience. The Jews then, as well as today, avoid using the word **God** because it is so sacred to them. They substituted the name **ADONAI**, or **Lord**, but for some, like the orthodox Jews, even that name is too holy. So orthodox Jews today use **HaShem**, or "the name." When writing, they would never fully spell out "the name," so they would spell **G-d**.

They were arguing about who would have the greatest position in **the** messianic **Kingdom** when it is set up. No matter how many times **Christ** would talk about **His** death and resurrection, they just didn't get it. **They** thought the beginning of the messianic Kingdom was imminent. They had a feeling of superiority. Therefore, **Yeshua** teaches them the lesson of being childlike by using a little child.

When Napoleon Bonaparte was exiled on the Island of Saint Helena, he was asked by one of his friends, "Who was the greatest warrior the world had ever known?" Without hesitation, Napoleon answered, "**Jesus Christ**." "But," his friend said, "you have not always talked that way. When you were winning battles, even up to the battle of Waterloo, you left the impression that you were the world's greatest warrior."

This is how Napoleon replied, "Yes, I have always acted as though I thought I was the world's greatest conqueror. I have had lots of time to think since I have been on this island. The Caesars, Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Charlemagne, and myself - we have fought with blood and tears and swords and iron, and we lost. All of us lost. We lost our scepters, our crowns and our offices. The only sword **Christ** had was a broken reed: **His** crown, some twisted thorns. **His** army, a band of fishermen and farmers: His ammunition, a heart of redeeming love. **He** lives, and my kind and I die. I stand here and call for the Old Guard to come, but they do not hear me. I hear nothing but the waves as they bite at the rock beneath my feet. But after 1800 years have gone to the tomb of time, **Jesus** calls and men

answer. If need be, they give their bodies to be burned: if need be, they follow **Him** into the heart of Africa; but better still, they live patient and triumphant lives in **His** name. Yes, the other warriors and I will ride down to dust, but **Jesus Christ** will live forever.<sup>896</sup>

Each time that **Jesus** had predicted His death, the apostles responded with pride and misunderstanding. This gave **Yeshua** an opportunity to teach them about servanthood or cross-bearing discipleship. Sitting down in the teaching position of a rabbi, **Jesus** called the Twelve to Him and said: **Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all (Mark 9:35)**. Ironically, those who would be last now, would be first in **the kingdom of Heaven**. It was not that **Messiah** abolished ambition. Rather, **He** redirected it. For the ambition to rule, **He** substituted the ambition to serve.

In 1997, two world-famous women died within a few days of each other. Princess Diana of England was best known for her beauty and style, while mother Theresa of Calcutta was hailed for her tireless service to the poorest of the poor in India. Who was first then? Who was last then? True selflessness is rare, and when it is found it is remembered.<sup>897</sup>

The apostles were arguing about who would have **the greatest** position in **the messianic Kingdom** when it is set up. No matter how many times **Christ** would talk about **His** death and resurrection, **they** just didn't get it. **They** mistakenly thought the beginning of **the messianic Kingdom** was imminent, and what was worse - **the Twelve** had a feeling of superiority. Therefore, **Yeshua** teaches them the lesson of being **childlike** by using a **little child**.

Consequently, **Jesus**, knowing their thoughts, called a little child whom **He** placed among them. Now a child has no influence at all. **Children** cannot advance anyone's career, nor enhance anyone's prestige. A child cannot give us things. It is the other way around. A child needs things. **Children** must have things done for them. So its as if **Christ** is saying, "If someone welcomes the poor, ordinary people, the people who have no influence and no wealth and no power, the people who need things done for them - that person welcomes **Me**. That person welcomes **God**."<sup>898</sup>

Then, taking the child in His arms, **He** said to them: **Whoever welcomes one of these little children in My name welcomes Me; and whoever welcomes Me does not welcome Me but the One who sent Me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest (Matthew 18:2; Mark 9:36-37; Luke 9:47-48)**. **Jesus** throws His arms around every humble and unpretentious believer in these gracious words, even as **He** typically did around **little children**. We are to receive one another with tenderness, care, kindness and love, opening our hearts to welcome fellow believers no matter who they are. In so doing, we embrace **the Lord Yeshua** and **the Spirit of God** who lives in them. We are to care for each other like precious **children**.<sup>899</sup>

Those who would seek to be great in the kingdom of Heaven would have to have a **change** in attitude and become **childlike**. **And He said: Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:3)**. **Yeshua** was teaching them that as **little children** are dependent on **their** earthly parents and **the talmidim** needed to demonstrate childlike dependence on their heavenly **Father** to enter **the kingdom of Heaven**. Only **childlike** faith brings salvation.

**Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven**. While faith is necessary to enter **the messianic Kingdom**, the position of **the apostles** in **the Kingdom** would be dependent upon taking the position of a **child**. **Children** recognize **they** have no rights in the home but are subject to the will of **their** earthly parents. **And whoever welcomes one such child in My name welcomes Me (Matthew 18:4-5)**. In other words, the greater the humility, the greater the place in **the Kingdom**.

**Yeshua's apostles** needed to focus on serving, rather than being served. In the world, pride, scheming, or political maneuvering usually marks the way to greatness. This is especially true in this present age. The quickest way up is often to step on the head and shoulders of someone else. **Messiah's** calling is to humility and self-abasement. As **children** live with simple trust in **their** loving parents, similarly believers in **the Lord** must have a simple, abiding faith in our heavenly **Father**.

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

**T**here was a Moth that had his home in the Sanctuary, and he lived long and was happy. For the place of his Habitation was between Two Tacks, in the edge of the Carpet in an obscure little Angle where the stair ascendeth unto the Pulpit. And it would have been difficult to select a Finer Place of abode for a Moth of Sedentary Habits. And he never, never wandered from his own fireside, but whitened the corner Where He was. That is to say, he wandered not until the time when this chapter in History Beginneth, and this Chapter is not a long one, and there will not be any Chapters after this. For that Moth is there no longer, and the place that knew him knoweth him no more.

Now this Moth was Serenely Happy; for the carpet was Fuzzy, and it was the Very Best Food a Moth could desire, and the Brushes of the Janitor came not near him. And the Moth listened unto the Organ, and he thought the Music was for his Edification, and he heard the Sermons and the Prayers, and so far as he knew they were addressed to him.

And he lifted up his eyes, and behold, there were Yards and Yards of Carpet, stretching down Long Aisles through the length of the Nave, and he looked unto the right hand and the left, and there was Carpet unto the uttermost borders of the Church. And the lines had fallen unto him in pleasant places, and he had a goodly heritage.

But he waxed fat, and grew Conceited. And he said to himself; Go now; I will explore mine Heritage; for, behold, all this is mine, and for me it hath been created. And he crept out of his Corner, and started on a journey down the Center Aisle.

And when he had gotten out about an Inch and the half of an Inch, behold, the Janitor came along with a Vacuum Cleaner, and just what happened unto the Moth, he hath not yet clearly defined in his own mind. For he was sucked up with a strong wind, and pulled down a hollow road, and blown down a rubber tube that led to an Iron Pipe into the Basement, and buried deep in Dust. And while he meditated, the Janitor came, and opened the Vat, and thrust in a Shovel, and scooped up the Dust and shoveled him into the Blazing Fiery Furnace, and the moth was in the Dust when this occurred. And the History of the Moth from that time on contained nothing of importance. But there seldom hath been a Moth whose Future Prospects were more encouraging than that one, if he had not gotten a Swelled Head, and thought that he was Boss of the Whole Establishment.

Now the people who think that the Universe was made for their own convenience would better stay in their own little corner of it; for if they get out where Important Things Occur, something is likely to happen either unto them or their theory.<sup>900</sup>