Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven

[Matthew 18:1-35](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2018&version=ESV)

Key Verse 4: “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Summary

Matthew 18 is often referred to as the discourse on the church. Here we see many big topics being discussed: Humility, forgiveness, how we are to treat one another and more, from the perspective of the kingdom of heaven. When we compare what Jesus teaches to what the world teaches we can quickly see how different the ways of the kingdom of heaven are from the world's ways.

How does Jesus see us? And how does he want us to see and treat one another in the kingdom of heaven and on earth today?

Let's consider these things and try to have the same perspective as our father who is in heaven. "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

1. V1-6. Why do you think the disciples asked Jesus “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”?
   1. The disciples most likely had a misunderstanding of the kingdom of heaven and what it meant to be considered ‘great’ in the kingdom of heaven. They may have wanted to be ‘great’ from a worldly understanding and for selfish purposes such as wanting to be served by others. Later in [Matthew 20:20-28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+20%3A20-28&version=ESV) we see this exact discussion and teaching from Jesus take place amongst his disciples implying this could have been an issue they were working out.
   2. **25** But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **26** It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, **28** even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
2. (1A). Jesus said “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”. Why do you think this is the case?
   1. Being ‘humble like a child’ could mean many things, but let’s consider teaching and serving.
   2. Teaching: Being humble like a child could mean that we behave like children when it comes to learning and receiving new information. Children are willing to learn and receive new information easily. Having an eagerness and willingness to learn could make us great disciples from the perspective of our teacher Jesus.   
      If we humble ourselves before God and acknowledge that he is wiser than we are, we can receive the most from the teachings of Jesus.
   3. Serving: Being humble like a child could mean that we do not consider ourselves great and worth being served, but are ready to serve and help others. Children are naturally humble and do not consider themselves great and to be honored and served. [Phil 2:3-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2%3A3-11&version=ESV) Says: "**3** In humility count others more significant than yourselves… Because even Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant." If we have humility and we lower ourselves for the sake of others, we will be doing the same thing that Jesus did when he lowered himself to serve us, even to the point of death. When Jesus did this he was exalted and became 'great'.
3. V5-9. What do you think is the main point that Jesus is trying to teach in these verses?
   1. We learn as Christians that we are to not sin and that we are to live holy, righteous lives. However, in Matthew 18 we are seeing a lot of emphasis being put on causing others to sin. Why is this?
   2. Verse 5 tells us to receive a child in Jesus’ name. Fundamentally we are to do to others what Jesus did for us: To love others and forgive them of their sins.  
      What is the opposite of this? To cause someone else to sin. When we are selfless and focused on receiving and helping others we are doing well, but when we become selfish and start using our gifts and body parts for selfish purposes it becomes easy to harm ourselves and others, even causing them to sin.
4. V10-14. What do you think is the main point of the parable of the lost sheep?
   1. God loves his little ones and sheep dearly. If one is lost, he will leave the 99 to go after the one to save it. It says in verse 14 that the will of the Father in heaven is that not one of these little ones should perish. We should have this same perspective and adopt this same love and care for the little ones and the lost sheep. Especially since we ourselves were once lost sheep. [Isaiah 53:6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+53%3A6&version=ESV) says: "All we like sheep have gone astray."
   2. Jesus loved us when we were lost so we shouldn't despise other lost sheep, but instead go after them and encourage them to come back into the fold with Jesus and even save them from perishing.
5. V15-20. How are we supposed to treat a brother/sister who sins against us according to these verses? Why do you think Jesus provided this specific way of handling those who sin against us?
   1. Verse 14 says “So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish”. The will of God is that everyone repent of their sins and be forgiven of their sins. We may not want to consider confronting someone and bringing up their faults and instead choose to silently forgive them as this could be easier and more socially comfortable, but this section shows that it can be very beneficial to struggle to work things out amongst one another. If the brother listens to you, then according to verse 15 you have gained a brother!
   2. Another way to look at this section is that it provides a clear protocol for dealing with sin in the church. When a brother or sister sins we may get upset and want them out of the body right away. But Jesus gave a methodical and orderly way to handle sin within the church, and most importantly it is a way that supports forgiveness and repentance, with exile as a last resort.
6. V21-35. What do you think is the main point of the parable of the unforgiving servant?
   1. This parable opens with: “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to…” which tells us that this example can most likely be applied to all of us in a general sense. We as believers can be compared to the first servant. The first servant had a great debt, but was forgiven and alleviated from all debt because they pleaded with their master and asked for mercy. The amount of debt the first servant owed was 10,000 talents which is a very very large sum, supposedly around $7.4 billion dollars in modern terms. But what happens next? That same forgiven servant found that his fellow servant owed him 100 denarii, a very small sum by comparison, about $12,400 in today’s dollars
   2. It is important to note the extreme difference in the amount of debt for each servant. God has forgiven us of soooo much. A lifetime of sin, much more than 77 sins, a massive massive debt. Yet here we are finding ourselves in a situation where we refuse to forgive a fellow servant for a single minor sin against us, a very insignificant debt by comparison. With this perspective, and from where God sits, it is very wicked to not forgive someone else that has sinned against us after Jesus has just forgiven us of soooo much more.
7. What might the theme or themes of Matthew 18 be? How might the themes in this teaching apply to the disciples’ original question?
   1. Some of the themes in this chapter could be: Love, Forgiveness, Sin, Mercy, Grace, Patience, Humility, Identity, Being Child-like, Perspective, Others, Unity, Community to name a few… What other themes do you see?
   2. We are all to identify ourselves as God’s little children no matter how big we may think we are. We all began as lost sheep, servants that sinned and asked for forgiveness, debtors etc. We have all like sheep sinned and gone astray and we are all brothers and sisters under our mutual Father in heaven. These verses all revolve around how we are to consider and treat each other, how to treat one of Jesus’ little ones, his children.
   3. The little ones are loved deeply by Jesus, therefore we should pay careful attention not cause them to sin or harm them. We should learn to see them the way that Jesus sees them, not the way that the world sees them. Treat them the way Jesus treats us.
   4. Jesus technically answered the disciples’ question “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”? in verse 4, but Jesus continued to teach. He shared many themes such as mercy, forgiveness, humility, and more, and these concepts could be considered attributes of ‘greatness’ in the kingdom of heaven that we should all display in our lives as a community of believers.
   5. Another way to look at this chapter is that Jesus is answering 2 questions that the disciples posed: V1 "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"? And V21 "How many times should I forgive"? One could make a case that the content of chapter 18 is simply Jesus answering these 2 questions from his disciples.