

Who is the GOAT?

If you're a sports fan, you know exactly what that question is asking. If you are NOT a sports fan, you are probably wondering if you're in the wrong room. But if you ARE a sports fan, you know that GOAT stands for Greatest Of All Time.

And sports fans love to ask that question – They love to ask, *Who is the GOAT?* Who is the Greatest player Of All Time?

For most Basketball fans, it comes down to one of 2 men – LeBron James or Michael Jordan. Some say that LeBron James is the greatest player to ever because of his stats + physicality. Others say its no contest – Just count the rings! [Jordan has six championships to LeBron's three]. Clearly Michael Jordan is the GOAT when it comes to Basketball.

And of course it's not just basketball fans. Football fans, baseball fans, even soccer fans – They all get into it! Everybody wants to know – *Who is the Greatest?*

That's what the Disciples wanted to know. Not in the world of sports, but in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Because that's how our passage begins – At that time, the disciples asked Jesus: "Who is the GOAT?" "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

In some ways, the question is Understandable. This passage takes place late in the ministry of Jesus. Which means they had been with Him for about 2.5 years at this point. They'd seen Him do miracles. They'd seen Him outsmart the Pharisees. They'd seen Him draw crowds of thousand.

And most of all, they had heard Jesus say that He was establishing a New Kingdom. They had heard Him say it over & over again.

So it is understandable that at this point they are starting to wonder where they fit into the Plan. After all, these men had left their homes and businesses to follow Jesus. Now they are sensing that Jesus is almost ready to establish His kingdom. So they want to know here they rank. So it is an *understandable* question.

But it's also an awkward question. In fact, if you look at what Jesus just said, you almost feel embarrassed for them. In cp. 16 Jesus told them that they had to deny themselves if they were going to follow Him. Read Matthew 16:24. Then in cp. 17, He told them that He was going to be killed by His enemies. Read Matthew 17:22-23

But it's pretty clear they were not getting it. Looking back, *we know* that Jesus was on way to the cross. But they weren't getting it yet – *they thought* He was about to take over the world. And they wanted to know where they were going to stand in the Administration. They wanted to know who was going to be the Greatest.

Jesus answers them with a Living Parable. Apparently there were other people around. We know this because Jesus calls over a child. We don't know the specifics. But there was child nearby. Jesus calls that child over to where He is.

If we are going to understand what Jesus says next, we need to know something about children in the first century. We need to know that children had virtually no status in that culture. That is not to say people didn't love their children; they loved their children as much as we do.

But in terms of the Status / Power / Position that children had in that society, it was none. That's why unwanted babies could be left on the rocks to die. It's why children could be beaten or sold into slavery to pay off a debt.

The point is – Children had no status. They were among the Weakest and Most Vulnerable members of society. That meant they were also among the Most Dependent members of society.

When you know that, you realize how radical the answer Jesus gives the disciples really is. This is picking up in v. 2... Read vv. 2-4

"If you want to be great," Jesus says, "you need to become like a child." That's the answer – Be like a Child.

And just to be clear, He doesn't mean *everything* about children. Some things children do are bad. Children can be Selfish. Mean. Cruel. They can be naive. Temper tantrums. It's not *always* a good thing to be like a child.

But that's not what Jesus is talking about. He is not talking about Childish Behavior; He is talking about the Humble Status of children.

That's why v. 4 says "Whoever humbles himself like this child..." Jesus is specifically referring to that child's Dependence and Low Position.

So if you want to be great in God's Kingdom, you need to be HUMBLE. That's the answer Jesus gives the disciples. Stop trying to get ahead of each other...and start serving each other.

The rest of the chapter is just Application. That's how I read it anyway.

Many months ago, I told you that Matthew is organized around five major sermons. So far we have looked at 3 of those sermons. And this – chapter 18 – is Sermon #4.

Which means, you have to look at Matthew 18 as a Unified Sermon. This is not a collection of random things Jesus thinks about 5 or 6 subjects. You may know pastors who preach that way! But that's not what Jesus does. This is a unified sermon.

Which means, this whole sermon is the answer to their question. If you want to know what it takes to be great in God's Kingdom, the answer is Humility. And then the rest of it is what Humility looks like in the lives of those who follow Jesus.

So just to recap before we move on – It all starts with being Humble before God. *They* want to know who is the greatest in the Kingdom. *Jesus says*, "You can't even get into the Kingdom unless you humble yourselves before God."

That's vs. 3 – "Unless you turn [the word means *repent*] and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

So that's where it starts – We have to admit that we are as dependent on God as a Baby is on Her Mother. If we want to be Saved, We have to Humble Ourselves before God.

And then once you have done that, you have to *KEEP* humbling yourself. That's what the rest of this is about. We have to keep humbling ourselves – Not only before God...but also before one another.

So with the rest of our time, I want to show you *Two* of the Ways that Humble Believers Behave Toward Each Other. So we're asking the question – How do Humble People live in God's Kingdom? We'll look at two answers to that question.

By the way, I had originally planned to cover *THREE*. You can see that from the outlines. We were going to go all the way to v 14. But for the sake of time, we're just going to cover the first two this week. Then next week, we'll pick up where we left off

So let's take a look at Two Examples of how Humble People live in God's Kingdom.

Number 1 – The first way Humble People live is that they Welcome the Weak and Powerless.

That's what Jesus says in v. 5. Read v. 5

I said before that Jesus uses this child to tell a living parable. When I say it is *LIVING* parable, I mean that He had a real child right there with Him. He doesn't tell a story about a child. He uses an actual child.

But that doesn't mean He is talking about actual children. Like I said, it is a living *PARABLE*. So Jesus is not talking in v. 5 *primarily* about how to treat children; it helps us with that too. But *primarily* He is talking about how we treat people who are *like* children. Which in *this context*, means the Weak and the Powerless. That's who vs. 5 is about.

So here is the 1st thing a Humble Christian does: A Humble Christian welcomes those who are Weak and Powerless.

This is partly driven by Theology. We know that *we* are weak and powerless. We know that at the most basic level, we are no different. Our physical circumstances might be better; maybe our citizenship is secure or we have enough money to pay the bills. But *spiritually speaking*, we know that we are sailing in the same leaky boat they're in.

Because that's what Jesus just said in v. 4 – The only way to enter God's Kingdom is to admit that you are weak & powerless before God. You have to be Humble to come to Jesus.

And then that humility motivates us to Help other people who are also Weak & Powerless. That's how it is supposed to work: We welcome the weak & powerless because we understand *theologically* that we are no different than they are. We too are weak & powerless.

It has famously been said that sharing the gospel is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. That's the idea here.

But then this is also driven by Devotion. That is, we do it because we love Jesus. We welcome the weak & powerless because we want to welcome Jesus.

It's right there in verse 5 – “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.”

Jesus Takes it Personally when We Welcome the Weak and the Powerless. Whoever welcomes one person of another race... Whoever welcomes one child caught up in the Foster Care system... Whoever adopts one baby whose parents cannot care for her... Whoever helps one single mom keep her baby instead of getting an abortion... Whoever gives a good job to one immigrant from another country... “*Whoever does these things,*” Jesus says, “does them for me.”

That's the other reason we welcome them. We welcome them because we welcome Jesus.

This is why Christians lead the way in these things. Yes, there are some areas where we still have some work to do. But when you set aside the [anti-Christian] *propaganda*, what you are left with is the fact that God's people *lead the way* when it comes to welcoming the weak & the powerless.

And it only makes sense. After all, we know better than anyone what it's like to be Weak & Powerless.

The second way Humble People live is that they Protect the Faith of Others. Believers know that no man is an island. They know that what they do & how they live has a direct impact on the faith of other people. Humble Christians know that – *and they live accordingly.*

This is what Jesus is talking about in vv. 6-9. Let's pick up in v. 6... Read vv. 6-7

Not only are we supposed to Welcome the weak and powerless; God also wants us to Protect their Faith. God wants us to protect the faith of those whose faith is vulnerable.

Jesus makes this point with a warning. He says, “Whoever causes one of these little ones to sin...”

Let me stop there for a moment. Jesus does something here that we need to notice. The word “little ones” is a different word than the word for children that Jesus uses in vv. 2-5. The effect of this is to shift the focus from weak people in general to Christians specifically. So it is still the weak and powerless. But now it is the weak & powerless who have *admitted* that they are weak & powerless by giving their lives to Jesus. That's who the “little ones” are here and in the rest of this passage.

We know this because Jesus specifically calls them the “little ones *who believe in me.*” So now He is talking about our fellow Christians.

So whoever causes other Christians to sin is in a world of trouble. That's what He says in v. 6 – It would be better for that person, Jesus says, to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and thrown in the depth of the sea.

A millstone was used to grind grain into flour. A millstone had two main pieces. There was a fixed bottom stone, and there was a movable upper stone. The movement of the upper stone against the bottom one is what crushed & ground the grain

There were two types of millstones that were commonly used – There was a Smaller, Household version. This was the sort of thing a woman might use in her own kitchen. This was almost like a mortar and pestle someone might use today.

Then there was an Industrial Strength version. [HERE'S A PICTURE](#) of a larger millstone. You can see the fixed base. Then that wheel-shaped stone that is attached to that beam is the upper stone.

That's what Jesus is talking about in v. 6. He doesn't use the word for the small household version. He uses the word for the large stone that a man or sometimes even an animal had to move. In fact, literally this was the "Donkey Stone." It was called that because many times you would have a donkey pull it in circles to grind the grain.

So it doesn't take a lot of imagination to realize that if you had one of those things tied around your neck... and then someone threw you into the sea... you would not be coming up again. It was a pretty awful way to go.

That's the picture Jesus uses to describe how much God hates it when we lead other people into sin: He hates it so much that we would be better off having that happen, than to fall under His judgement for leading other people into sin.

The point of all this is that God is really serious about our sin. It really offends Him when we sin. Because not only does our sin hurt ourselves; But it also hurts the people around us.

Sin is going to happen – that's point of v. 7. "It is *necessary* that temptations come." The idea there is that it is unavoidable. Until Jesus comes back, this is what it is like to live on a Fallen Planet – there will always be temptations.

But you *do not* want to be the one through whom the temptation comes. You do not want to be the one through whom other people are led astray.

That's why Jesus uses such strong language in vv. 8-9. Read vv. 8-9

Jesus is not advocating self-mutilation here. Please do not hurt yourself as a way to deal with temptation. This is a fig of speech – "Hyperbole." A hyperbole is an intentional exaggeration to make a point.

The point He is making with this hyperbole is that we need to take *serious steps* to deal with our own temptations. *Why?* Because our sin can do serious damage – not only to ourselves, but also to other people (back to 6-7). *That's* why we have to take sin so seriously: The impact of our sin on other people is so dangerous that we have to deal with it.

So if the Internet leads you into sin, cut it off. Get rid of it altogether if that's what it takes. If a Particular Relationship is tempting you, put an end to that relationship. If the Money in your Bank Account is tempting you to be Greedy, pull it out and give it all away.

Someone will say, "Why so drastic?" Isn't there any room for moderation? Why do we need to take such drastic action?

The answer is that if you fall into sin, not only are you going to hurt yourself; you're also going to hurt the Faith of the People Around You. *Especially* the Weak Ones (back to v. 5)

You're going to hurt your Children's faith. You're going to hurt that New Believer who just came to Jesus. You're going to hurt that Addict who has finally broken free and finally has some hope. You're going to hurt that Teenager who is drawn to Jesus – But she is also suspicious b/c she's heard that Christians are all hypocrites. And she's waiting to see if it's true.

It's not just about you. You're going to hurt those people's faith if you don't deal with your sin.

So deal with your sin. That's the point of vv. 6-9. If we want to be Great in God's Kingdom, then we need to humble ourselves by thinking about Someone Else for a change. We need to humble ourselves by Protecting the Faith of *Other Believers*, and not just worrying about our own.

I want to close with a story someone told last week at the EFCA national conference.

A church was thinking about making a change to their worship service. The pastor & the elders had decided they wanted to stop taking a formal offering; they wanted to stop passing plates during the worship service. Instead they wanted to put a Box at the rear of the sanctuary.

The idea was that people would just put their tithes & offering in the box when they came to church. They wouldn't need to take an offering; Folks would just use the Box.

This particular church had to vote on a change like this. So they called a Business Meeting.

It turned out most people supported the change: "Let's build a Box" – that was the consensus

But a few people were against the Box. One man in particular was Strongly Opposed. When it came to the discussion time, he stood & spoke strongly against this change. *He didn't sin* – but he was *Passionate* about his Opposition to the Box.

When the discussion was over, they took a vote. And the Box won overwhelmingly – there were only a handful of votes against the Box. So it was an overwhelming victory for the Box.

The Moderator asked, "Is there any other business?" "Anything else we need to talk about?"

At that point, the man who had argued against the Box raised his hand. Everyone in the room took a deep breath. "*What's going to happen now?*"

The moderator recognized him – "The floor is yours, Sir."

The man stood and said... "I WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER TO BUILD THE BOX."

That man got it. He understood what Jesus is talking about in this passage. He understood that the way to be Great in the Kingdom of Heaven is to be Humble.