

οὐ μὴ - AIN'T NOBODY GOATED IN THIS KINGDOM!

SERIES:

Stories for the Heart – a closer look at the words and works of Jesus.

23 March 2025 – Scottsville Community Church, 9 am

READING: Matthew 18:1-6 (Who is the greatest?) – (**WORDS**)



SERMON OUTLINE

- The kingdom misunderstood
- The kingdom explained
- The kingdom protected

INTRODUCTION

2025 **Times Higher Education (THE)** university rankings are out!

These rankings are **allegedly based on 18 performance indicators** which include teaching, research environment, research quality, international outlook and industry.

In short, if you have not been following these rankings for a long time like me, they work this:

Did you attend Wits? It must be **number 1 in the country!**

Do your kids like UP? It obviously is number 2!

Do you have a nice friend who went to UCT? It is somewhere there at the top! **But, the 'Deputy Mother' was recently kicked out.** Oops, then it can't be up there, otherwise we will be suggesting she did a great job before being asked to leave!

My wife and my mother are UJ graduates, so that makes **UJ one of the top 5.**

Those ranking mean **absolutely** nothing!

But we entertain them because we want to be number one and **be associated with a number one** institution.

The **disciples in today's story will try to get Jesus to also rank** them. Let's now take a closer look at their attempt.

	What the 1 st century audience saw and heard	What we must see and hear in 2025
The kingdom misunderstood	‘At (same time - KJV) that time the disciples came... ‘Who (then – NIV, NAS, NKJV) is the greatest (meizon) in the kingdom of heaven?’ Matthew 18:1 ‘And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you discussing (dialogizomai) on the way?’. But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest’. Mark 9:33-34 ‘An argument (dialogismos) arose among them as to which of them was the greatest’. Luke 9:46 According to Matthew, the disciples ask this question shortly after Jesus’ conversation with Peter about paying Temple tax. There seem to be two ideas here. If even Jesus (and Peter) has to subject himself to paying earthly taxes, then how can Jesus claim that the kingdom of heaven has come? [Shouldn’t the kingdom give them some special privileges and exemptions from the things common people do?]. The other idea might be related to the transfiguration. The narrative also follows the Transfiguration where Jesus was glorified in the sight of Peter, John and James. The three must have told the twelve. And Jesus’ choice of the three who witnessed the transfiguration must have been questioned by the rest. And so, then, the question is will the kingdom also have these three as its VIP’s? Matthew suggests that the disciples asked Jesus whereas Mark and Luke give the impression that he asked them a question. The answer probably lies in the definition of the Greek words used by both Mark and Luke. The word used for discussing/argument is <i>dialogismos</i>. It refers to internal thought/reasoning/calculation/deliberation/doubt/argument. This need not be a verbal dispute/question (Luke 9:47 – word used for thought is <i>dialogismos</i>). Whether verbal or nonverbal, this was a burning question in their hearts, the kind that gave them sleepless nights. Moreover, it wasn’t just a few who were concerned about this matter, but all.	We read this story 2000 years later and are not able to connect all the dots. If their question is inspired by the transfiguration, there was more to it than the 3 disciples: • The glory of Jesus. • The voice from the Father, ‘This is my Son in whom I am well-pleased. Hear him’. The Transfiguration was for Jesus and about Jesus. So why do the disciples become fixated on the dramatic aspects of it? How we need constant reminders of the glory of Jesus: • In the church: he is the head of the church. We are primarily here for him. • In the world: he is the firstborn of all creation. He sustains the world. • In heaven: he is the Lord of glory. It is a privilege to be associated with Jesus, especially when he has become your Saviour. But every now and then, we become tempted to seek for ‘more’. The song we sang (Satisfied) is a necessary reminder that only Jesus can truly satisfy us. It was his sovereign will that Peter, James and John be present at the transfiguration.

Their **parents too** were troubled by this!
*'Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something...'say that these sons of mine are to sit, one at your right and one at your left, **in your kingdom**.'... 'we are able (to drink the cup)'...it is for those whom it has been prepared by my Father'. ' Matthew 20:20-23*

There is the pastoral side we must not ignore. People go through a lot. Life is hard. What do you say to people when you **talk about your blessings?** Most of what we post on social networks is **jealousy-inducing**.

This kingdom is about the King – **Jesus**. It is not about positions and greatness. **They misunderstood the kingdom.**

The Kingdom Explained	'Truly (amen), I say to you unless you turn and become (genesthe) like children, you will never (ou me) enter the kingdom of heaven.' Matthew 18: 3 Jesus answers their question in two steps: Step 1: Their question relates to what is it they must do to also get what they consider to be a 'preferential treatment' when the kingdom comes in its fullness. Jesus points out to them that entry into God's kingdom is not automatic. In other words, they have a skipped an important step in their reasoning about the kingdom. This important step calls them to 'turn' and 'become like children'. The 'truly/amen' and the 'never/ou me' speaks of an impossibility of entering the kingdom without this change. Their association with Jesus is not adequate to get them in. Their question (disciples and Mother Zebedee) about 'greatness in the kingdom' assumes that they are already in the kingdom. Jesus challenges that here. This fact alone is sufficient to disarm their misplaced priorities. His answer is about who will be in the kingdom, not who will be greater in the kingdom. That is, if a person would not trust Jesus for salvation in the first place, then the talk about being the greatest is meaningless.	<u>Enter the kingdom:</u> In his response, Jesus does what every good bible teacher must do, to explain first the way to God's kingdom. This kingdom is 'near' or 'in your midst', and not as distant as their question suggests. In Jesus, God has come near to make possible a new way of living. This new way sets people free from the sin and its eternal consequences, eternal death. It restores a broken relationship between man and God on the merits of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The punishment of sin has been paid in full. This life is accessible through repentance from dead works and faith in Jesus who has paid the price for man's liberation. Have you accepted Jesus 'like this little child'? We must come trusting Jesus' sacrifice, not any of our goods works. We must accept the gift of his salvation with open hands (repentance).
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Step 2:

Whoever **humbles himself like this child** is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'. Matthew 18:4

'But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side and said to them, "whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. **For he who is the least among** you all is the one who is great'. Luke 9:47-48

'And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, 'If anyone would be first, **he must be last of all** and **servant of all**'. Mark 9:35

The answer, therefore, to their question is that the greatest is the:

- One who **humbles** himself/herself
- One who is **least** among them.
- One who is the **last** of all.
- One who is the **servant** of all.

And these virtues are embodied in a child who stands in the middle of the room. Jesus used the child to point out two lessons:

1. Repentance and faith are embodied in a **child-like attitude** towards God.
2. And now in the second part of his answer, he would show that all **life is to be lived humbly**.

The Enduring Word commentary:

*This was probably a great disappointment to the disciples. They knew that in that day, children were regarded more as property than individuals. It was understood that they were to be seen and not heard. Jesus said we have to take this kind of humble place to **enter the kingdom**, much less be the **greatest** in the kingdom.*

This must be an **upside-down kingdom**! It values child-like attitudes, the last, the servants, the least and the humble. **None of them had these qualities** at that time because they were all concerned about being first. In essence, Jesus was telling, **none of you are the greatest right now**. Not even Peter! Is he the **Pope?**

We **all want to be great**. We want our lives to count, to be significant. That is a noble feeling. We are a **great little church**. Scottsville Community Church is a **decolonised** Mainline church with a **dehypnotised** Pentecostal missiology. We are a black African church. We have a **great message** for the people who now live in Scottsville. **We must feel great** about Christ's work in us and through us – knowing Jesus known by him and **making Him known**.

The **problem is desiring to be greater**! And, sadly, that is what they asked. This is sad because it is not the **way of the kingdom**. The way of the kingdom is the way of Jesus. **Philippians 2: 5-8** details this life.

Equal in: Person, works, power, judgement, honour

His Kenosis: heavenly glory, independent authority, eternal riches...

[Arranged by John MacArthur.]

The way of Jesus is pro-humility, **pro-child, pro-weakness** and pro-servanthood.

Is South Africa a 1st world country – **with 18 million on a R 350 grant** (\$ 19)? The intentional adoption of a pro-poor lifestyle by believers in SA remains one of **untapped evangelistic** tools!

The Easter period in SA is the time where **a lot** of people die on the roads. What is a **Christ-like intervention** to this challenge?

We must dwell on the fact that Jesus chose a child to illustrate his point. Whether single, married or divorced, **as a Christian, we have a responsibility to display the same affection Jesus showed to children, today.** If you are born-again and desire to marry, **the mother of your child** should be the first person to consider for marriage, even if she is not yet born-again!

‘For the promise is for you **and for your children...**’ Acts 2:39a

God saves the father because he is also interested in the child and the mother. We need a **missiology that goes beyond ourselves.** You are not the only one God seeks to save. In this church, **children are active participants in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.** I don’t imagine Jesus excluding kids from this sacred meal when he says **they already possess kingdom-building qualities!**

Greatness is in humility. **Will this not lead to abuse?** We now turn to the **kingdom protected.**

The kingdom protected	“whoever receives this child (<i>paidion</i>) in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. Luke 9: 47 ‘Whoever receives one such child (<i>paidion</i>) in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me’ Mark 9:37 ‘Whoever receives one such child (<i>paidion</i>) in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones (<i>mikros mikroteros</i>) who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea’. Matthew 18:5-6 The ‘but’ in verse 6 makes it clear that the ‘child’ in verse 5 refers to those who believe in Jesus and not the literal child. What did this warning mean to the disciples who were concerned about being the greatest? • Pride destroys fellowship. • They were to protect those who turn and become God’s children. They must guard the faith of those who humble themselves and serve. They must not be trampled upon. • They are not to introduce their own agendas. They must serve agenda of Christ: The believer (child) is Christ’s. Christ ‘belongs’ to the Father. The kingdom is a weighty thing. The Father alone is in charge, through the Son. You are servants in it.	‘causing to sin’ Humility trampled upon: • In the church – so many sexual abuse cases in the various courts today. • Home ‘submission’ – is submission to your husband always godly? • Workplace – hard workers are often overlooked for promotion. Incompetent but well-spoken people are often promoted. • Land issues in SA – the Afriforum/Solidarity is playing games with the ANC’s vulnerability at the expense of the poor people’s stolen land. The weightiness of the kingdom and the church call for reverence in all our transactions with the lowly, especially if Christian! God will act (verse 6)! The God of meekness who calls us to humility and service is a ‘man of war’. Never be the reason people turn their backs on God. Enduring Word commentary: <i>It is a wicked thing to sin, and it is a far greater evil to lead others into sin. But leading one of Jesus’ little ones into sin is far worse, because you then initiate someone into an instance or a pattern of sin that corrupts whatever innocence they had.</i>
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CONCLUSION

In his book 'the Satisfied soul', John Piper asks **four questions** that I think those disciples and us all need to here today:

- Is the deepest basis of my joy God's greatness or my greatness?
- Am I more satisfied praising him or being praised?
- Am I God-centred because of his surpassing value, or am I God-centred because he highlights my surpassing value?
- Would it be heaven to me to see God or to be God?

Do not offend anyone. Life is hard. The economy is not growing. Jobs are scarce. You can't afford a higher purchase **agreement instalment** anymore? Pay half the instalment. If that is too much, pay a quarter of it.

Do not cause anyone to sin. Is your relationship with the person next to you holy? Are you serving them or are you harming them?

Who then is the greatest? The greatest is the one who serves. People who serve find strength to downplay their misfortunes. **A delayed call from a pastor** hurts people who are not given to service. That is, the service you give others is used by **God to meet your own deepest needs**.

Serve! Serve everyone especially those of the household of faith...and those no one cares about. **Do give your money to people at the traffic lights**, give and ask no questions. Amongst other things, this church seeks to actively recruit all **theologians at UKZN**. They are needed here. We will not fail to serve, **everyone!**

NEXT SUNDAY: We look at the Kingdom and blindness.

Amen.