

GREATNESS WITH GOD

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Mark 9:33-37 reveals a conversation that Jesus had with his disciples after arriving in Capernaum: “And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.” It is interesting that Jesus did not criticize the *desire* to be first with God. Rather, the Lord teaches the fundamental principles of *how to be great with God*.

Humility

A parallel account of we read about in Mark 9:33-37 is found in Luke 9:46-48. On this occasion when his disciples were disputing about which of them should be greatest, Luke 9:47 says that Jesus perceived “the thought of their heart.” The thought of their heart obviously included pride. Jesus tried to correct this problem by teaching them humility. In the house there in Capernaum, Jesus “sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Jesus then took the child and set him in the midst of his disciples and said, “Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receives me: and whosoever shall receive me, receives not me, but him that sent me” (Mark 9:37). In this context, receiving the little children refers to the children of God. But in what way do we demonstrate humility and receive God’s children in Christ’s name?

Serving the brethren

Humility involves service and we must serve our brothers and sisters in Christ to be great in the kingdom of God. In Mark 10:42-45, Jesus said to his disciples: “Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. *But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister, and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a*

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ransom for many.” Matthew 25:31-40 says, “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, *Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*” The goats are the ones who “did it not to one of the least of these,” and therefore did it not to Christ (Matt 25:45). Thus, we will be judged according to whether or not we have served God’s children. What we do in service to our brethren is service to Christ.

Becoming as little children

In the parallel passage of Matthew 18:1-4, when Jesus set the child in the midst of the apostles, he said, “*Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*” Jesus also said on a later occasion, “*Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein*” (Mark 10:14-15). Children are very humble and, in general, are very quick to believe what they are taught and to do as they are told. We must receive the kingdom as a little child and humble ourselves like a little child in order to be great in the kingdom of heaven. It is important for us to realize that Jesus did not tell the apostles that no one will be great in the kingdom of God. But he did correct their pride by teaching them to humbly believe, obey, and serve.