

## Stage V. Jesus Withdraws to the Gentile Regions Surrounding Galilee

### C. Jesus End His Withdrawal With Discipleship Training

## The DAILY JESUS NEWS #136

### 3. Jesus' Teaches on "True Kingdom Greatness," Part I: A Servant-Attitude MT 18.1-6 (Parallel Text: MK 9.33-37; LK 9.46-48)

<sup>1</sup> <sup>MT</sup>At that time the disciples came to Jesus in the house and asked, *"Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"* <sup>L</sup>But Jesus, perceiving what they were thinking in their hearts, asked them: <sup>M</sup>*"What were you arguing about on the road?"*

But they kept quiet because they had argued about who was the greatest on the way.

Sitting down, Jesus called all the Twelve to him and said, *"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."*

<sup>2</sup> <sup>MT</sup>He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. <sup>3</sup> And he said:

*"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>M</sup>Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it."*

<sup>4</sup> <sup>MT</sup>*"Therefore, whoever humbles himself by taking the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."*

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = <sup>MT</sup>, Mark = <sup>M</sup>, Luke = <sup>L</sup>, John = <sup>J</sup>, Acts = <sup>A</sup>. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are in red italics*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	Capernaum
Timeline	September (Month 33)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage V: Jesus Withdraws to the Gentile Regions Surrounding Galilee
	C. Jesus End His Withdrawal With Discipleship Training
Title	3. Jesus Teaches on "True Kingdom Greatness," Part I... A Servant-Attitude

#### COMMENT:

As a Jew, writing his gospel for primarily a Jewish audience, Matthew understood the importance of showing his readers the relationship between Jesus and his New Covenant, and Moses and the Old Covenant. Jesus was as superior to Moses as the Creator is superior to his creation. Jesus' New Covenant did not abolish the Old one, it fulfilled it.

Just as Moses wrote five books of the Old Covenant Law, Matthew recorded five major New Covenant teachings of Jesus, that together made up his "commands" to his disciples. Each of the five teaching sections ends with the words: *"When Jesus had finished..."* The five teachings are Matt. Chapters 5-7, 10, 13, 19, and 23-25.

Four of the teachings were delivered in Galilee. The last one of the four, found in MT 18, is centered around the theme of "True Greatness in the Kingdom of God," and constituted Jesus' final words before departing on his eight month pilgrimage to the cross. Five DAILY JESUS NEWS readings, including this one, will cover this teaching.

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The setting for Jesus' teaching is ironic, but appropriate. On the long walk back from Caesarea Philippi to Capernaum, the apostles had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. When we recall that they were all in a period of sustained spiritual weakness and even failure, their vanity in talking about 'greatness' appears petty and misguided. Jesus certainly thought so. He gave them this teaching to set them straight about the nature of true greatness, and to help them see how far they were from achieving it at that point.

In today's reading Jesus warned them that they must all "change," or "turn." Otherwise they would never be great at all. They were totally off base and needed to adopt a true kingdom value system.

Jesus summed up true greatness in a passionate desire to serve others first, and put one's self last. That is love in action. Jesus had this servant attitude all the time. He left the glory of being worshipped as God in heaven, and took up the form of a bond-servant of God and man in his incarnation. Jesus later said: *"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* The apostles saw it in him every day, yet they were blind to the glory and greatness of his servant-heart. The entire teaching of MT 18 is about the incomparable greatness of loving service to God and man.

Today's reading begins the teaching by defining greatness as humble service that puts others first and self last, and illustrating it with the quality of being child-like. In Jesus' day children were valued, but had no social standing or rights. They were expected to stay out of the way, to be silent, and work hard in the house and family business. They were in a position lesser than even slaves, for they had little to contribute compared to a hard-working adult.

This is why the disciples were amazed that Jesus gave time to fellowship with children, and welcomed them into his arms. Typical adults would not even acknowledge their existence. Jesus was radical in his attitude toward children, compared to his culture.

By illustrating true greatness with a childlike attitude, Jesus was saying that love should cause us to consider ourselves to be totally dependent upon God...willing to be a nobody, unacknowledged by every body, yet tirelessly willing to serve anyone else first. Our ambition must be to become the lowliest servant of all. That is a great description of the way the King of Glory lived his life, and gave his life for each of us.

#### APPLICATION:

I grew up in a church with a truly great man by Jesus' standards. I do not remember a single sermon from my grade school days, but I will never forget this 'great' man. He was a high official of his nation, the deputy Ambassador to be exact. Yet at church he was the servant of all.

He literally begged the church to give him the job of cleaning the toilets, so that the janitor would not have to do it. He greeted everyone at the door with a huge smile when they arrived for services, and sent each person off when they departed with a blessing. He was the first to arrive and get to work, and the last to leave. If anyone had a need, or was sick, they could be sure that he would arrive at their home the very day he heard of it, and do everything in his power to help. He prayed for every member of the church ceaselessly, and witnessed constantly.

Though I was not a christian at the time and but an elementary school boy, I will never forget this man, and the way he served people with sincere love. The Lord was talking about people like him when Jesus spoke of child-like, humble service.

*Are you comfortable being totally unknown and unacknowledged in your service to others?*

*Do you put others first?*

*Are there any limits to the kind of service you are willing to freely give out?*

*How does pride affect your willingness to serve?*

These are the kinds of questions that foster the greatness that Jesus desires to see in each of us as his servants.