

**INTRODUCTION #1** - According to Matthew 17:22-23, Jesus again affirms the plan of God. That plan is to suffer at the hands of men, be killed and raised again the third day. We know Peter wanted a different plan when he said in Matthew 16:22, “Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” Peter was rebuked by the Lord as he did that. Now He says it again, the same plan of God, nothing has changed, and now we find the disciples not rebuking God’s plan, but being grieved by God’s plan. I suppose there are times when God’s plan grieves us. It’s not something we desire nor want. But who are we to question God’s plan? When God spoke to Job in vs. 38 explaining the unfolding of things in Job’s life, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”

**NOTE:** This was God’s plan, to send an atoning sacrifice of His Son, to be the atonement for our sin. For the disciples they were to learn this was the plan, this is what they were heading towards. This is the first lesson they needed to learn.

**INTRODUCTION #2** - The question of paying taxes. We have spent some time on this before, how do Christians live in a wicked, evil world, and obey the laws of the land? Peter was asked about paying taxes. As bad as I hate to admit it, Christians should pay what they are legally obligated to pay, although it’s too much, but we are to obey the laws, as long as those laws don’t violate God’s commands in Scripture. “A Christian has no right to lie, steal, commit murder, or worship a false god, no matter what the dictates of a human government might be and no matter what the consequences for disobedience might be.”<sup>1</sup> The fact is even the most godly and moral leaders cannot infuse morality in a culture. It is futile work at changing laws without changing hearts. The disciples had to learn this, serving God in the midst of a corrupt world and culture. John 18:36 must be our view as we do the same, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”<sup>2</sup>

The Christian is a citizen of God’s kingdom, and not of this world. This however, does not exempt us from laws made by secular men. By being a good citizen shows he shows he loves God and his country by obeying laws that don’t violate the word of God.

What do these two points have to do with our text in Matthew 18. From Matthew 17:14 through chapter 20, Jesus is teaching His disciples principals about kingdom living here. These first two are important, God’s plan not ours, and being obedient to human laws is honoring God. But now we move into a deeply important lesson about eternity. One the disciples still were lacking to grasp.

**POINT 1 - A CHILD OF GOD (VS. 2)** - Let’s first start with who we are as believers and followers of Christ. We are children of God, adopted into the family of God. We were orphans, but now we sit at the kings table. However, there’s another side to children that’s important to note here. They are incomplete, weak, temperamental, underdeveloped, unskilled, unreliable, and immature. A child will need correction. A child will need training.

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<sup>1</sup> The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Matthew; pp. 90

<sup>2</sup> ESV

**POINT 2 - WHO IS THE GREATEST? (VS. 1)** - After seeing what they saw, being around miracles that Jesus did, now they are concerned with who is the greatest? In Mark 9:33-34, “They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, What were you discussing on the way? But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.” The ESV uses the word “argued” and the AV used “disputed” and that would suggest they were in some sort of competition for the greatest. They were literally arguing over who would be the greatest. Talk about senseless, and foolish things. We often spend too much time on such as well. And we often miss the truth of God’s word when we tangle ourselves in mindless things. Paul warned Timothy in his second letter, “No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.”<sup>3</sup>

**Point 2B** - They were silenced when Jesus asked them what they were discussing. They knew He knew what the conversation was about. The truth has a habit of making us silent when we push something that doesn’t align with God’s word. They completely missed His teaching in Matthew 10:38-39, “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.” And even more closely in Matthew 16:24-26, Jesus adds the same lesson again, but adds, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” In fact, they were so caught up in their desire for prestige, they were impervious to much of what Jesus said about suffering, dying and the resurrection.

**NOTE:** It seems today what the modern day church needs isn’t more of what can we get out of it, or how we can be elevated, and how selfish ambition is so widespread in the formation of worship services. We have routinely ignored the responsibility of serving our fellow brethren, and truly worshipping God. Why? Because we haven’t completely understood Matthew 10:38-39. We should pour over this verse constantly.

**POINT 3 - WHY JESUS USED CHILDREN AS AN EXAMPLE.** The word used for child here is *paidion*. It is a very young child of which it is speaking. A child is very trustworthy. A child believes and doesn’t analyze every single scenario. Many people have gone to a devil’s hell because they had no child like faith, they questioned everything they could not explain and trusted in their own wisdom.

**POINT 4 - THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (VS. 3).** This phrase refers to God’s rule and where He rules supreme. Jesus addresses the issue of pride here. There’s no place here for pride and self righteousness. The word enter means one must come from the outside. Colossians 1:13-14, “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” John the Baptist came preaching “repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”<sup>4</sup> This is what is great about the kingdom. Salvation. Not where you sit. Not who is first. It’s redemption. Repentance towards God, a turning around, and in 2 Timothy 2:24-25, “The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” So arguing over prestige in the kingdom is foolishness.

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Timothy 2:4

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 3:2

**4B** - One enters the kingdom through spiritual bankruptcy. Woe is me. We go back to the Sermon on the Mount and see where Jesus said this about humility, “**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**” The word poor is often used to describe one who is “destitute, afflicted, powerless, lowly, needy.” Pride will keep you out of the kingdom, because you are unwilling to admit you are a sinner in need of a Savior. Meekness also mentioned has the idea of “*a sense of having nothing to offer God.*” We should stop asking people to make a decision for Christ, because that puts it on them, but ask them to repent and believe the gospel.

**POINT 5 - BECOME LIKE A CHILD (VS. 3B).** Jesus used the word converted here and it’s translated elsewhere in the NT as “turning” or “turning around.” It means to go in the opposite direction. If you say you are a Christian and you’re still running in the same direction you were, there’s no conversion! 1 Thessalonians 1:9, “**For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.**” When Paul was before Agrippa in Acts 15:18-20, “**to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.**”

*“A little child makes no claims of worthiness or greatness. He simply submits to the care of his parents and others who love him, relying on them for all his needs. He knows he cannot meet his own needs, and has no resources to stay alive. That is the kind of humble submissiveness that results in greatness in God’s eyes and in His kingdom.”*<sup>5</sup> Too many adults have formed so called “wisdom” opinions about God. They have become “set in they ways.” Adults tend to think things through and evaluate rather than just saying I believe, and trusting God for salvation. What will my friends think? What will my spouse think? How will this affect this or that? It’s this kind of thinking that will keep you from the kingdom of God.

**POINT 6 - HE WHO HUMBLER HIMSELF IS THE GREATEST (VS. 4).** Jesus settles their argument, and it’s likely not an answer they wanted. Often times as we search for answers to our questions in this life, we find that God’s ways are not ours. The greatest is the one who humbles himself. Much of the modern day church isn’t humble, it’s about what benefits you. How you look. How you feel. What makes you comfortable. I’ve heard clips of messages about “finding yourself” or “being the real you.” I don’t want to be the real me. It seems they missed the important truth Jesus taught in Matthew 10:39 and elsewhere, “**He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.**” It’s not entirely about being a martyr. It’s about not putting yourself first.

The great warning of Proverbs 16:18 should be cemented in our minds, “**Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.**”<sup>6</sup> In James 4 the entire chapter is devoted to “things to avoid” or “avoiding worldliness”, and in vs. 6-10 the great warning is given, “**But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of**

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<sup>5</sup> The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Matthew; pp. 99

<sup>6</sup> ESV

the Lord, and He will exalt you.” It’s the laughter of eternal things that will doom you. It’s the thinking of yourself as being good enough that will seal your fate. Let all that be turned to mourning and weeping as you think of who you are and the Lord will exalt you.

I am afraid today many are thinking, I did this or I did that. If your salvation testimony starts with I, there’s a problem. It always starts with God. And once you know you are depraved and vile, and He is your only hope, pride disappears.