

Matthew 18:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Analysis

The disciples' question 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' reveals worldly ambition creeping into spiritual ministry. They've seen Jesus' power and heard of the coming kingdom but understand neither its nature nor its values. This question exposes the human heart's natural pride and competition even among Christ's followers. Reformed theology recognizes that sinful nature persists in believers, requiring continuous repentance and reorientation toward kingdom values that invert worldly standards.

Historical Context

The question follows the Transfiguration and discussions about Jesus' coming suffering. Jewish messianic expectations included hierarchy in the restored kingdom. Disciples argued about greatness multiple times (Mark 9:33-34, Luke 22:24), showing this wasn't casual curiosity but serious ambition. Jesus' answer radically contradicts their assumptions about power and position.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What ambitions for spiritual greatness or recognition do you harbor?
2. How does worldly thinking about success infect your view of ministry?
3. What makes kingdom greatness different from worldly achievement?

Interlinear Text

Ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ προσῆλθον οἱ μαθηταὶ τῷ Ἰησοῦ
At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus
G1722 G1565 G3588 G4334 G3588 G3101 G3588 G2424

λέγοντες, Τίς ἄρα μείζων ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν
saying Who G687 the greatest is At G3588 the kingdom G3588
G3004 G5101 G3187 G2076 G1722 G932

οὐρανῶν;
of heaven
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Additional Cross-References

Philippians 2:3 (Parallel theme): Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Matthew 23:11 (Parallel theme): But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

Romans 12:10 (Parallel theme): Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

Matthew 7:21 (Kingdom): Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.