

Matthew 18:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Analysis

Jesus' statement 'Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven' answers the disciples' question about kingdom greatness (v. 1). True greatness requires childlike humility—recognizing total dependence on God. 'Humble himself' is active, not passive—choosing to renounce status-seeking and self-promotion. The paradox: greatness comes through humility, not self-assertion. Children's lowly status, teachability, and dependence model kingdom values.

Historical Context

The disciples' question 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom?' (v. 1) revealed wrong thinking about kingdom status. Jesus' response upends worldly values—greatness through servanthood, not dominance. Children in ancient culture had no legal rights or social status, making them ideal illustrations of kingdom humility. Self-humbling precedes exaltation (23:12).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What does childlike humility look like practically in your life?
2. How does the kingdom's upside-down value system challenge your pursuit of greatness?

Interlinear Text

ὅστις	οὕν	ταπεινώσῃ	ἑαυτὸν	ὥς	τὸ	παιδίον	τοῦτο
Whosoever	therefore	shall humble	himself	as	G3588	little child	this
G3748	G3767	G5013	G1438	G5613		G3813	G5124
οὗτός	ἐστιν	ὁ	μείζων	ἐν	τῇ	βασιλείᾳ	τῶν οὐρανῶν
the same	is	G3588	greatest	in	G3588	the kingdom	G3588 of heaven
G3778	G2076		G3187	G1722		G932	G3772

Additional Cross-References

Luke 14:11 (Parallel theme): For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

James 4:10 (Parallel theme): Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Mark 10:43 (Parallel theme): But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:

Luke 9:48 (Parallel theme): And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.

1 Peter 5:5 (Parallel theme): Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Isaiah 57:15 (Parallel theme): For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Matthew 18:1 (Kingdom): At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

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