

## (53) Disciples Contend About Greatness (Mt. 18:1–35; Mk. 9:33–50; Lk. 9:46–50)

1. This single “episode” is actually a series of events which all center on the need for humility.
2. Matthew’s Events.
  - a. Disciples argue about greatness (Mt. 18:1; Mk. 9:33–35; Lk. 9:46).
    - 1) Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven? μείζων *meizōn* <sup>#3187</sup> compar. of μέγας, μεγάλη, μέγα <sup>#3173</sup> <sub>243c</sub>.
    - 2) Modern American English is rather fond of the mega prefix (megabit, megabyte, megacorporation, megahertz, megalomania, megamerger, megaphone, megapixel, megaplex, megaton, megawatt).
    - 3) Christ had previously taught His disciples regarding Kingdom Greatness (Mt. 5:19; 11:11) and will have to do so again (Mt. 18:2–6) and again (Mt. 20:25–28) and again (Mt. 23:11–12).
    - 4) The disciples conversation regarding greatness was out of Jesus’ earshot, but not His awareness (Mk. 9:33–34; Lk. 9:47). The diligence He manifest through His prophetic office and ministry is significantly geared towards spotting the roots of pride and working on them immediately.
  - b. Christ illustrates with a child (Mt. 18:2–5; Mk. 9:36–37; Lk. 9:47–48).
    - 1) Application #1: become childlike (Mt. 18:3). Aor.pass. στρέφω *strephō* <sup>#4762</sup> <sub>21x</sub> & Aor.mid. γίνομαι *ginomai* <sup>#1096</sup> <sub>621x</sub>. Conversion is necessary for entrance into the Kingdom.
    - 2) Application #2: become humble (Mt. 18:4). Fut.act. ταπεινόω *tapeinoō* <sup>#5013</sup> <sub>14x</sub>. Humility is necessary for exaltation within the Kingdom.
    - 3) Application #3: receive such childlike brethren (Mt. 18:5; Mk. 9:37; Lk. 9:48). Our treatment of Christ through the treatment of others is an essential feature of the Kingdom of Heaven—Mystery state (cf. Matt. 25:40,45).
  - c. Christ warns about stumbling blocks (Mt. 18:6–10; Mk. 9:42–48).
    - 1) Following three positive applications, Jesus delivers one very strong warning; do not cause such childlike brethren to stumble (Mt. 18:6). Aor.act. σκανδαλίζω *skandalizō* <sup>#4624</sup> <sub>29x</sub>.
      - a) The Divine discipline consequences for permitting and/or producing such stumbling blocks are only comparable to an unthinkable alternative.
      - b) One way in which we might cause a childlike brother to stumble is to despise them (Mt. 18:10a).
      - c) “Their angels in heaven” are an interesting subject for study (Mt. 18:10b). Even better than a guardian-angel personal bodyguard is a servant-messenger with continuous access to God the Father.
- d. The Ninety and Nine (Mt. 18:12–14).
  - 1) This message is also given in Luke’s parable triad of Luke 15 [PM23: Parables of Lost Sheep, Coin, The Prodigal Son]. It is likely that the Lord delivered this message repeatedly to His disciples during this time (cf. Jn. 21:15–17).
  - 2) The question “what do you think” and the manner in which it is asked lead the disciples to only one possible answer.
  - 3) Humanity may be content with a 99% retention rate, but God the Father’s standard is 100% safe and secure.

A difficult verse; but perhaps the following may be more than an illustration:—Among men, those who nurse and rear the royal children, however humble in themselves, are allowed free entrance with their charge, and a degree of familiarity which even the highest state ministers dare not assume. Probably our Lord means that, in virtue of their charge over His disciples (Heb. 1:13; Jn. 1:51), the angels have *errands* to the throne, a *welcome* there, and a *dear familiarity* in dealing with “His Father which is in heaven,” which on their own matters they could not assume.

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- 2) The κόσμος receives a “woe” proclamation for its “σκανδαλούς” nature (Mt. 18:7a).
  - a) The perfect plan of God in creating volition beings and permitting the exercise of that volition in a manner contrary to His directive will creates a situation in which stumbling blocks are inevitable (Mt. 18:7b).
  - b) Individuals who are the tools for the κόσμος become individual objects for God the Father’s “woe” proclamation (Mt. 18:7c).
- 3) Metaphoric self-amputation is only comparable to an unthinkable alternative (the lake of fire).
  - a) Hands, feet, and eyes are important, but a person can live without them if they had to. It may hurt to cut off our stumbling blocks, but that hurt is only comparable to an unthinkable alternative.
  - b) “Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” is a remarkable textual criticism exercise followed by a notable hermeneutics exercise and an interesting homiletic exercise (Mk. 9:44,46,48).
    - (1) Verses 44&46 are scribal insertions from verse 48. MT keeps all three, NA/UBS does not.
    - (2) Gehenna is perhaps the most vivid description of the eternal fire (Jer. 7:31; 19:5–6; 32:35; 2<sup>nd</sup> Kgs. 23:10; Isa. 66:24).

- 4) The parable pictures a wandering believer.  $\pi\lambda\alpha\nu\acute{\alpha}\omega$   $\text{plana}\acute{\omega}$  <sup>#4105</sup><sub>39x</sub> used three times in this passage (Mt. 18:12<sub>x2</sub>,13).
  - 5) Leaving the ninety-nine “on the mountains” does not risk them in the man’s absence. They are presumably in a secure sheepfold with a doorkeeper (Jn. 10:7-10).
  - 6) Bringing back the lost is a prime shepherding activity (Ps. 23; Jer. 40:6-7; Ezek. 34:1-16; Mt. 12:11-12; Jn. 10:11-18; 1<sup>st</sup> Pet. 2:25).
  - 7) Rejoicing “more” is not a license for wandering! (Lk. 15; Rom. 6:1-2)
  - 8) [The Ninety and Nine](#) is a beautiful hymn described in [101 Hymn Stories](#).
- e. Corporate Discipline (Mt. 18:15-20).
- 1) Although Matthew recorded these written words during the Dispensation of the Church, Jesus Christ spoke these words during the Dispensation of Israel (32AD).
    - a) Matthew’s written word in Greek was ἐκκλησία  $\text{ekkl}\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\iota\alpha$  <sup>#1577</sup><sub>114x</sub>. What was Jesus’ spoken word? See comments in [GM46] Peter’s Great Confession for ἐκκλησία  $\text{ekkl}\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\iota\alpha$  & συναγωγή  $\text{sunag}\acute{o}\gamma\eta$  <sup>#4864</sup> in the LXX for the Hebrew term  $\text{qahal}$  <sup>#6951</sup>. Another consideration is the Aramaic term  $\text{kaniyshta}$ . See [TDNT](#) vol. 3, pp.518-526.
    - b) “Brother” and “assembly” were Mosaic-Jewish terms before “brother” and “church” became ecclesiastical terms (Lev. 19:17-18; Deut. 31:10). The terms “Gentile” and “tax collector” were never pejorative in an ecclesiastical context.
  - 2) The fundamental principle of corporate discipline is to “win” a brother with the least amount of involvement.
    - a) A one on one rebuke may be sufficient (v.15).
    - b) A two or three delegation may be sufficient (v.16).
    - c) A unified congregational stand may be required (v.17a).
    - d) Separation is the last resort (v.17b).
  - 3) The like-mindedness of two or three, and the unity of mind throughout a congregation, is a reflection of the divine attitude concerning the matter (vv.18-20 cf. Matt. 16:19 [GM46]).
- f. Seventy times Seven (Mt. 18:21-22).
- 1) In response to the teaching about corporate discipline, Peter wanted to know how far the forgiveness should extend (Mt. 18:21 cf. v.15).
  - 2) The rabbis used Amos 1:3; 2:6 to teach a three times forgiveness pattern. Peter probably felt that seven times forgiveness would be a righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20).
  - 3) The idiom Jesus uses comes from Gen. 4:24 and speaks of an uncountable number.
- g. An Old Account Settled (Mt. 18:23-35).
- 1) The series of messages on humility concluded with an unlimited call for forgiveness (Mt. 18:21-22) and wrapped it up with a powerful parable on forgiveness (Mt. 18:23-35).
  - 2) Humility is required for entrance into the kingdom (Mt. 18:1-6), and that humility is evidenced by forgiveness for others (Mt. 18:21-35).
  - 3) The parable king desired to settle accounts ( $\text{sunair}\acute{o}$  <sup>#4868</sup><sub>3x</sub>) (Mt. 18:23,24 cf. 25:19).
    - a) Accounts are settled when the servant is indebted. This pictures the unbeliever who can only have his debts released by grace.
    - b) Accounts are also settled when the servant is entrusted with a stewardship. This pictures the believer who is expected to be productive with the master’s wealth.
  - 4) The two debts in this parable are incomparable to each other (Mt. 18:24,28). Debt between slaves is insignificant when contrasted with the infinite eternal debt the one slave had to the king.
  - 5) The first slave is forgiven for his impossible debt (Mt. 18:24-27).
    - a) The king felt compassion ( $\text{splanchnizomai}$  <sup>#4697</sup><sub>12x</sub>), released him ( $\text{apolu}\acute{o}$  <sup>#630</sup><sub>66x</sub>) and forgave him ( $\text{aphi}\acute{\epsilon}\mu\iota$  <sup>#863</sup><sub>143x</sub>).
    - b) Yet, the slave remained a slave (Mt. 18:32) and remained in debt (Mt. 18:34).
    - c) This parable does not describe a substitute who pays the slave’s debt in full. It simply presents a king’s compassion & forgiveness without that king’s satisfaction or the payment made.
    - d) So, the slave’s “release” was not an emancipation and the king’s “forgiveness” was not based on propitiation through a sufficient redemption.
    - e) The slave asked for patience (Mt. 18:26) so he could work for his own release. The king is indeed patient (2<sup>nd</sup> Pet. 3:9), but his compassion cannot violate his righteousness (Rom. 3:25; 1<sup>st</sup> Jn. 2:2).

### 3. Mark & Luke's Additional Items.

- a. A non-follower was casting out demons (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 9:49-50).
  - 1) The apostle John was concerned over what a non-follower was doing in Jesus name (Mk. 9:38; Lk. 9:49).
    - a) The ἐκβάλλων ekballōn isn't named but Pastor Bob calls him Tina. The apostles saw τινά tina casting out (pres.act.ptc. ἐκβάλλω ekballō #1544<sub>81x</sub>) plural demons.
    - b) "We tried to prevent him" indicates that John wasn't the only disciple who had a problem with what Tina was doing. 1p.pl.imperf.act.ind. κωλύω kōluō #2967<sub>23x</sub>: *hinder, prevent, forbid*.
  - 2) This episode is similar to a concern that Joshua had for Moses' reputation (Num. 11:27-30).
  - 3) The disciples weren't bothered by the activity itself but were unwilling to accept an outsider doing what they were authorized to do.
  - 4) In their minds, Tina was not an acolyte of Jesus, because Tina was not in their group.
  - 5) Although the disciples repeatedly hindered Tina, Jesus ordered them to stop hindering him (Mk. 9:39; Lk. 9:50).
  - 6) "He who is not against us is for us." This grace orientation serves believers well today in terms of Biblical ecumenicalism.
  - 7) Miracles in Jesus' name and ministry to Jesus' followers will be key features in the coming Tribulation of Israel (Mk. 9:39,41 cf. Mk. 13:22; Mt. 24:9-13,23-24; 25:40,45).
- b. Salted with fire (Mk. 9:49-50).
  - 1) This doctrinal principle can be found in Matthew (5:13) and Luke (14:34), but is unique to Mark as an epilogue to the self-amputation Gehenna message (cf. Mk. 9:42-48).
  - 2) ἁλίζω halizō #233<sub>2x</sub> (Mt. 5:13; Mk. 9:49) and ἅλας halas #217<sub>8x</sub> (Mt. 5:13<sub>x2</sub>; Mk. 9:50; Lk. 14:34<sub>x2</sub>; Col. 4:6) are boring word studies but important for application.
  - 3) Lev. 2:13 influences our interpretation of salt and also influenced the manuscript tradition. As a hermeneutical guide, we observe the connection between salt and fire in every offering.
  - 4) Since the destruction of Gehenna's fire is not for our destruction (cf. Jdg. 9:45), the refining fire of our testing in time is for our seasoning (1<sup>st</sup> Pet. 1:7; 4:12).
  - 5) The seasoning of the believers' salt is a grace application (Col. 4:6) for the production of peace (Mk. 9:50).