

Greatness: Childlike, Unoffended, and Spiritually Violent

I. INTRODUCTION: MATTHEW 11 AND 18

- A. Matthew 11 reveals that true greatness in God's kingdom is not found in status or human recognition rather points to John the Baptist as "the greatest man ever born of woman." John the Baptist is the model for greatness, spiritual violence, and an unoffended heart. Some of the themes in Matthew 11 are: greatness, humility (childlikeness), offense, spiritual violence, and the Lord's strategic pursuit of people as seen in the flute and the funeral dirge.
- B. Matthew 18 addresses a lot of the same themes. In some ways it is part 2 to the Matthew 11 sermon. Matthew 18 begins with the disciples asking about greatness. In the Lord's response He points to humility and childlike faith, the importance of being unoffended, the danger of equipping others to be offended, the need for spiritual violence, and the necessity of forgiveness.

II. GREATNESS: JOHN THE BAPTIST IS THE MODEL (Mt 11)

10 For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.' 11 "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Mt. 11:10-11)

- A. ***There has not risen one greater than John the Baptist***: This is the testimony of Jesus over John the Baptist's life. Jesus emphasized a new paradigm for greatness. It is based on our heart responses not on natural gifting and resources and is thus, available to all. greatness before men.
- B. ***Discriptions of John the Baptist: He came preaching in the wilderness: (Mt 3:1)*** He fulfilled the, Is 40, prophecy and was the "voice crying out in the wilderness." The wilderness in biblical times was the place of testing, encounter with God, and dependence on Him. It stripped away human supports and revealed both human weakness and God's provision. ***He ate locust and honey***: (Mt 3:4) (Mk 1:6) John the Baptist ate locusts and wild honey because they were simple wilderness foods provided directly by God. His diet was an expression of his dependence on the Lord and a separation from worldly excess. It was his "daily bread" or "manna from heaven." He was ***Clothed in camels hair and a belt around his waist***: (Mt 3:4) (Mk 1:6) In each area of life, John the Baptist rejects the comfort and honor the world has to offer. His clothing was in direct contrast to those of the Pharisees.
- C. ***What Jesus says about John the Baptist: More than a prophet: (Mt 11:9)*** Jesus said John was "more than a prophet" because John was *the prophesied forerunner, the immediate herald of Christ, and the greatest representative of the prophetic office*, standing at the turning point between the Old and New Covenants. ***Greatest man ever born of a women***: (Mt 11:11)

- D. **What People say about John the Baptist: He has a demon:** (Mt 11:18) This is in direct contrast to Jesus' assessment of John the Baptist. The religious leaders of the day and all those pursuing a life of comfort and honor see John the Baptist life and message as too extreme and unhealthy.
- E. **What John the Baptist says about Himself:**
1. **...he who comes after me is mightier than I...** (Mt 3:11) In John 1, we get more insight into the revelation John the Baptist had regarding Jesus as he says, **"he who comes after me is preferred before me, for he was before me."** (Jn 1:15) John the Baptist had the revelation of the eternal Word, who was in the beginning with God, made flesh. John the Baptist is clear that Jesus is **"mightier than I."**
 2. **whose sandals I am not worthy to carry:** (Mt 3:11) In John 1:26, John the Baptist says **"I am not worthy to loose His sandal strap."** This is not hyperbole for John the Baptist. This is his true heart posture.
 3. **I am not the Christ... I am the voice spoken of by Isaiah:** (Jn 1:20,23) John the Baptist was clear on who he was and who he was not. Much like Jesus, John the Baptist had disciples and followers. His objective with his followers was to get them connected to Jesus instead of himself.
 4. **He must increase I must decrease:** (Jn 3:30) This is the heart posture of the friend of the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom is preoccupied with increasing the affection of the bride for the groom. In the previous verses John the Baptist disciples expressed concern that people were leaving the ministry of John the Baptist and following the other guy baptizing. John the Baptist is like... "thats the entire point!"
 5. **I have joy that is full:** (Jn 3:29) John the Baptist source of full joy was the voice of the bridegroom. To hear Jesus' voice was the premier reward for John the Baptist.

III. GREATNESS: HUMILITY IS THE WAY (Mt 18)

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 18:1-4)

- A. **Who then is the greatest? (18:1):** This question is one of the age old questions every heart ask. We have a longing to be great. The disciples have heard the Matthew 11 sermon. They heard Jesus' declaration over John the Baptist. It seems as though several months have passed (between Mathew 11 and 18) and John the Baptist was beheaded in Matthew 14.

- B. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child (18:4): Notice Jesus does not correct this longing but rather prescribes the road to get to greatness. Jesus' path to greatness is in direct contrast to man's prescribed method of achieving greatness. Jesus' simply defines greatness as "childlike humility."

IV. CHILDREN: TO RECEIVE THEM IS TO RECEIVE HIM

3 Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 18:3)

- A. We are to become like children: Jesus is not telling us to become childish. He is telling us to become childlike in humility, lowliness, dependence, and willingness to receive the kingdom on God's terms. A child in that first-century setting did not possess social rank, power, status, or influence. They are asking, *Who is greatest?* Jesus points to someone with virtually no status and says, in effect, "Become like this." First, stop striving for spiritual status. Second, learn to receive as a child rather than achieve. Third, be like a child being teachable before God.
- B. We are to receive them: The key word is "receive." It means to welcome, accept, receive favorably, take in, or show hospitality toward someone. So Jesus is not merely saying, "Let a child come into the room." He means something closer to: welcome them, make room for them, value them, care for them, and treat them as belonging to Christ. There are probably two closely connected senses in the passage.

5 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives me. (Mt 18:5)

- C. Wisdom will be justified by them:

18 But wisdom is justified by her children (Mt 11:18)

V. TEACHING THESE LITTLE ONES TO HAVE OFFENSE

6 Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes. (Mt 18:6-7)

- A. Cause one of these little ones... to sin: We have just been instructed to become like children, to receive the little ones, and that wisdom will be justified by the children. Here, in verse 6, Jesus begins to address the other side of how "little ones" can be treated. Rather than "training a child in the way He should go" there is a training in the ways of sin.
- B. Woe to that man by whom the offense comes: The NLT translates the end of verse 7 as "but what sorrow awaits the person who does the tempting" and the ESV, "but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes."

- C. As a society, even within the church, we are inundated with philosophies, methodologies, counselors, therapist, all sorts of ways of thinking that teach and train the young to take up offense and embrace the root of bitterness within them. The language, of course, is more sophisticated couched in the slogans of justice, honesty, and accountability but it is void of the biblical truths that actually bring freedom to the human heart.

VI. THE KINGDOM SUFFERS VIOLENCE

8 If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire...(Mt 18:8)

11 There has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. (Mt 11:11-12)

- A. The Kingdom of God now suffers violence. To “suffer” violence means that God “permits” (requires and rewards) spiritual violence in our pursuit of the deeper things of God. Jesus used the word “violence” to speak of a lifestyle of holy abandonment to God. Jesus was speaking of spiritual violence, not physical violence. Spiritual violence points to being willing to pay any price of self denial in seeking and obeying God. Radical obedience is violent because it is disruptive to our worldly pursuits. It violently confronts our sinful desires, pride and selfishness. It “violently” reorders our priorities. It reorders the way we talk, spend time and money, how we relate to our enemies, pursue comfort, success and honor, and express our sexuality.
- B. Spiritual violence speaks of holy intensity in meekness and in loving God and people. It disrupts our life. It disrupts the status quo that we have grown accustomed to. We declare war on our sin and a religious spirit. This has a dramatic or violent impact on the devil’s kingdom and religious systems. The source of our spiritual violence is the love of God and not fear.
- C. Jesus connected spiritual violence to the lifestyle of John. Jesus set him forth as a model of what greatness is in God’s sight. The measure of John’s greatness was not the number of people he impacted; it was the measure of his “spiritual violence” or his resolve to seek God without compromise. John is the premier example of wholeheartedness in a transitional generation.
- D. God suffers or requires and rewards spiritual violence. He is waiting on us to violently seek Him. He wants people with a spiritual fervor that will lay aside everything that gets in the way of obeying and loving God with all of our heart. This does not refer to being irresponsible. We do not need to abandon our God-given responsibilities to obey God. Jesus was speaking of laying aside compromise, selfish comforts, pride, fear, and religious reasoning. We must walk this out in the practical issues of real life. Most do not mind hearing sermons on radical obedience. What convicts and disturbs us is when someone lives it out in the way they spend time and money