

The Kingdom of God and Eternal Life (6)
Who Is The Greatest in The Kingdom of God ?
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

Brothers, sisters and friends, in the past few weeks we have seen that being in the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. If you don't experience righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, then you are not in the kingdom of God; If you are not in the kingdom of God in this age, then you won't be in the kingdom of God in the future when the Lord Jesus comes back. Today we are going to look at another aspect of the kingdom of God.

^{NAU} **Matthew 18:1 – 4** ¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” ² And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, ³ and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Some people may say, “That’s nothing new, I have known this for a long time!” But have you ever put this teaching into practice? How are you going to practice it?

Becoming like children and entering the kingdom of God

Here the disciples asked the Lord, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” The disciples had left their families, their careers and their possessions to follow the Lord Jesus, they pursued the kingdom of God instead of money and status in the world, so they wanted to know what they would get in the kingdom of God? Who would be the greatest?

The Lord did not tell them who would be the greatest, instead he called a child to come, and he told them that unless they are converted and become like children, they wouldn't even enter the kingdom of heaven, forget about being the greatest in the kingdom!

But how can people be converted and become like children? When we are already grown up, we cannot turn back to become like children! But the Lord Jesus says if we are not converted and become like children, we can't enter the kingdom of God!

In verse 4 the Lord says, “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” That is the key verse; please notice these two words “humble himself”. To be

converted and become like children doesn't mean that you are shrunk to the size of children. To be converted and become like children means that you humble yourself as children.

When you humble yourself, you lower your pride, you lower your status. The Lord says if you lower yourself to the status of children, then you are the greatest in the kingdom of God.

The status of children

In today's society children's status is not low at all, on the contrary the parents and the adults have to find ways to please them, to make them happy! But in New Testament times, it was a different story!

^{NAU} **Galatians 4:1** ¹ Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,

The heir is the one who will inherit the wealth and the work of the family, that's why it says here "he is the owner of everything"; even though when he is still a child, he is not yet the owner now, but in the future when he grows up he will be the owner. But when he is still a child, what is his status? He is just like a slave of the family!

This is quite surprising! In New Testament times, the status of children was very low, they were as low as slaves. When the Lord Jesus said to humble yourself like children, he was saying that you have to humble yourself to become like slaves to serve other people.

Are you willing to humble yourself like slaves to serve other people? If you are, even though the people in the world may despise you, our Father in heaven is on your side, He will raise you to a great position. The lower you humble yourself, the greater our God will raise you. If you humble yourself to the lowest position, our God will raise you to the greatest in the kingdom of God!

How do we lower ourselves to become like slaves to serve people?

But how do we lower ourselves to become like slaves to serve people? Does it mean that we cook, we wash the dishes, we wash the clothes, we do the house work for people? Does it mean we till the soil for people? How do we put this into practice?

Let's look at the life of the Lord Jesus. Even though the Lord Jesus did wash the feet of the disciples in John 13, his purpose was to teach the disciples an important principle, and he did it only once, he didn't do it regularly. In the future if the Lord is willing we will study that principle in John 13.

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Indeed in the gospel accounts we see that in everyday activities, quite often it is the other way around, it is the disciples who were serving the Lord Jesus.

^{NIV} **John 4:5 – 8** ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

Here it clearly says that the disciples had gone out to buy food for the Lord; It was not the Lord serving them, but the disciples serving the Lord!

^{NIV} **Mark 14:12** ¹² On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

Here the disciples asked the Lord where he wanted them to prepare the Passover meal for him!

In these two passages the disciples were serving the Lord Jesus, not the Lord serving them! We are to imitate the Lord Jesus, right? So how do we put his teaching into practice? How do we humble ourselves like slaves? We need to look into the Bible to find the answer.

1. The Lord gives his life as a ransom for many

^{NIV} **Matthew 20:20 – 21** ²⁰ Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. ²¹ "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

Here this mother asked the Lord to let her two sons sit at his right and his left in the kingdom of God, that means they would be just one step lower than the Lord, but greater than all the other people in the kingdom. What is the Lord's answer to her request? Let's continue to read in this same chapter:

^{NIV} **Matthew 20:25 – 28** ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

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Here the Lord is repeating the same point, that whoever wants to be great in the kingdom of God, he must be your servant; But take notice of verse 28: “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom.” Here “to serve” and “to give his life as a ransom” are linked together, “to serve” is parallel to “to give his life as a ransom”!

The Lord Jesus came to give his life as a ransom to save us! That’s how he serves us, that is his ultimate service to us! If we want to serve, we should imitate what the Lord has done!

But on the other hand when people are sick or for some reason cannot take care of themselves, we are ready to do the work for them, we take care of them, we cook for them, we do the housework for them! I have done this to help people when they are in need. But to become the greatest in the kingdom of God is not simply to cook for people, to do the house work for them.

If you want to become great in the kingdom of God, you have to follow the Lord’s example. The Lord Jesus gives his life as a ransom to save us! But we are sinners, we cannot give our lives as a ransom, we have sins in our lives, our lives cannot be a ransom to save other people! Then what should we do to follow the Lord’s example?

We give our lives to help people to be saved. We serve them by helping them to know Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus, so that they would be saved. That’s the best way to help people! That’s the best service we can give to people!

So the Lord serves us by giving his life as a ransom to save us, that’s his ultimate service to us. We give our lives to help people to know God and the Lord Jesus so that they can be saved, that is our ultimate service to people.

But how do you do it?

1. You share the gospel not only with your word, but also with your life

- When you share the gospel with people, you tell them the teaching of the Lord Jesus, but you yourself must live in total obedience to the Lord’s teaching. You live what you preach! In this way you share the gospel not only with your word, but also with your life.
- The most difficult part is to encourage people to submit to the kingship of God, because people by nature don’t want to submit to others, they want to be number one! That’s why Adam and Eve sinned, because they wanted to be equal with God. We human beings don’t

want to submit to others. So you yourself will have to submit totally to God to set an example for them, you ask God to give you the power and the wisdom, and you pray for them, asking God to change their hearts. It requires power and wisdom and love in order to help people to submit to God.

- You don't give up when you face opposition. When you tell people to submit to God and the Lord Jesus Christ, you will face opposition from the people. They may attack you and insult you, but no matter what happens, you don't fight back, you don't give up; you continue to serve them with a humble heart like a slave.

So the first point is to share the gospel not simply with your words, but also with your life.

2. We humble ourselves by becoming obedient to the point of death

^{ESV} **Philippians 2:7 – 9** ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

Here it says the Lord Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. God's will for the Lord Jesus is for him to die for the sins of mankind, and the Lord obeys God's will to the point of death. If we are to imitate the Lord, we also have to obey God's will to the point of death; Whatever His will is for us, we carry it out to the point of death.

So the second point is to obey God's will to the point of death.

My testimony

I can share a short testimony. I myself have gone through a lot in my life. I was a Vietnamese refugee, I escaped out of Vietnam and arrived in Hong Kong in early 1979, some time in February 1979 (I am uncertain about the exact date because we didn't have a calendar on the refugee boat). Some people in Hong Kong despised us and made fun of us, but I did not fight back, I did not hold a grudge against them. The Canadian government granted me permanent resident status when I was still in the refugee camp. I came to Canada in July 1979; At that time I didn't know English, I had to work in the factory in daytime, I self-studied English and completed the high school program in the evening time. (You can read my testimony "Goodness and Lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life" on the Christian Disciples Church website.) I went to University of Ottawa in 1981, I committed my life to Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ in 1983. In 1989 Pastor Bentley and I gave up our comfortable life and everything we had in the world to preach the gospel. Since then until now 2024, in these

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35 years we have been preaching gospel in different places. Because my English is no good, some people have made fun of me and looked down on me; When I encourage people to submit to Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus, some people attacked me and insulted me. But no matter what people do to me I insist on obeying God's teaching, I don't fight back, I continue to serve them with a humble heart like a slave, I even pray for those who attacked me and insulted me! Indeed I have been praying for some people for many years. Our Father in heaven always helps me and encourages me, I know that I am very precious in His eyes.

The story of Jonathan Goforth

Finally I want to share with you about the missionary work of Mr. Jonathan Goforth as an example of the servant attitude. Mr Goforth is a Canadian, he and his wife Rosalind Goforth went to China in 1888, that is 136 years ago. At that time China was not yet a republic, China was still under the rule of the Qing Dynasty. Mr. Goforth and his wife had to learn Chinese first. You know that Chinese is difficult, and they had to work very hard to learn Chinese in a short time. Soon they preached the gospel in Chinese in many different places in China, especially in the North East part of China, the Manchurian area. They had gone through the Boxer Rebellion, the fighting between the warlords of China, sickness, and opposition from the Chinese local government and even from the Chinese people. But they never wavered, their zeal for the salvation of Chinese people kept them going. They preached the gospel to the Chinese people for 46 years, and during that time Mr. Goforth had lost his eyesight and become blind, but even the blindness couldn't stop him from preaching the gospel. He continued to preach, but he couldn't read the Bible passages when he preached, so he had someone standing next to him to read the Bible passages for him. Finally in the year 1934 he was too weak to work, he needed other people to take care of him. He saw that he had become a burden to his co-workers, only then did he agree to leave China to return to Canada. After he came back to Canada, he didn't stop, he continued to preach in different churches, he called the young people to go to preach the gospel in China. On his final Sunday Mr. Goforth preached 3 sermons, one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening. After the third sermon, he told his wife that he was very tired and wanted to sleep. During the sleep he departed and went to be with the Lord.

Mr Goforth is indeed an example of humbling oneself to serve like a slave and serve to the very end of his life.

Conclusion

Now let's sum up everything. Today we looked at the question "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of God?" The Lord Jesus says that whoever wants to become great must be your servant, the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom to save us.

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The Lord Jesus gave his life as a ransom to save us. If we want to become great in the kingdom of God, we follow the Lord's example, we give our lives to help people to know God and the Lord Jesus, and we obey God's teaching to the point of death. We preach the gospel not just with our word, but also with our lives, that's our ultimate service to people.