

## Matthew 18: 2-5 (June 4, 2017)

### *What Counts For Greatness?*

Matthew 18: 2-5

2He called a child, whom he put among them, 3and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

### ***What Counts for Greatness?***

**Who is the Greatest in the Kingdom?** In the previous chapter, Jesus was talking about greatness. Jesus doesn't start the conversation, we should note, the disciples do. They come to him with a question about this kingdom of God he's been preaching and teaching about. Specifically, they want to know what is greatest in the kingdom or, more likely, who will be the greatest in the kingdom.

It's not that unusual of a question when you think about it. In any new setting or situation we want to gain a sense of our place, our standing, our status. We feel more comfortable when we know the rules of the environment and have figured out the pecking order. Even if we don't like the pecking order or think it's unfair, we still feel better knowing it, as we might then at least look out for ourselves or even advance according to its rules. And so the disciples ask Jesus about the rules of this kingdom and what it takes to be great.

**The Value of Children:** In response, he draws a child to him. And before we get all sentimental, we should remember that in the first century children had no particular economic or societal value. That doesn't mean that parents didn't love their children; of course they did. It's more the simple recognition that for most of the world's history children were an economic liability until they could work and generate income. As a result, they have no standing in the ancient world, no material value, and no power. And so this child represents the vulnerability and need and utter dependence of all children of that day.

**What Counts for Greatness?** And that is what Jesus says will count for greatness in the kingdom. Not military power, or physical might, or athletic prowess, or great beauty, or immense wealth, or societal standing and fame, or any of the other things they or we are likely to equate with greatness. But rather, what counts for greatness are vulnerability and need and dependence.

This isn't new, mind you. We've noticed that from the beginning of Matthew's story, Jesus seems to favor those who can admit their need and ask for help. But here he states it most plainly: the greatest constitute those who recognize their need for God and for each other.