

# MATTHEW



## STUDY GUIDE

### Introduction:

Humankind has a historical consistent, probably universal, desire for recognition and reward. In the scripture for this week, we found that disordered desire present in the question from the disciples to Jesus, “Who is the greatest?” Humans have desired “greatness” - recognition, reward, power, privilege – throughout history. From the Garden of Eden and Tower of Babel to military leaders like Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and Hitler, this disease is a tragically common thread across history. It’s so common, we should probably recognize something. **We probably suffer from this same disordered desire as well.** During the sermon, we asked this simple question, “**Where are you addicted to greatness?**” If you were able to identify this in your life, and as you are comfortable sharing with your group, what is your answer to that question?

### Text: Matthew 18:1-14

In response to the question from the disciples, “Who is the greatest” Jesus answers in three ways:

1. He *redefines greatness* as “life lived in service, motivated by love.”
2. He *warns* against the perversion of greatness. Namely, this disordered desire makes us willing to exploit others for our own purposes. Jesus warns that this is a deeply dangerous way of life.
3. He *identifies compassion* towards others as the focal point of service. In this he names the priority of evangelism. We should be willing to sacrifice our own preferences for the sake of those who do not yet know God.

Which of these three ideas from Matthew 18 was most interesting or challenging to you and why? What word, phrase, or idea from the text itself stuck with you the most?

### YOUR MOVE

The antithesis to greatness is humility. How is God calling you to live with humility this week? Are there any disordered desires you need to sacrifice to God, to let die?

Wrap up your time by committing to pray with and for one another, that God would take our disordered desires from us and replace them with the childlike humility of the Kingdom.

### **Deeper Dive: notes for further study**

*These notes come directly from the study that went into preparing this sermon, yet were not included fully in the sermon itself.*

- The Jewish Rabbis of Jesus day also spent time arguing about who would be the greatest in God's future kingdom. Here are a few examples of texts they considered important.
  - Psalm 11 – Note the strong language about those the Lord “hates with a passion” and how the “upright” - those who love Justice and righteousness, will “see his face.” To see God's face is clearly an indication of reward.
  - The Rabbis debated whether the study of the law or the practice of the law was more honorable in God's eyes. Here's an excerpt from one Rabbinic discussion on the topic.
    - *What is more important: the study of the Torah or carrying it out in practice? In older times, greater value was clearly awarded to religious practice; it was rare to grant precedence to the study of the Torah.*
    - *b. Sifre Deuteronomy 11:13 § 41 (79B): R. Yose the Galilean (ca. 110) said, “Study is greater than action; for study preceded the dough offering by 40 years; the levying of the tithe by 54 years; the observation of the fallow years by 61 years; and the observation of the jubilee years by 103 years.” (Study began immediately on Sinai, but the implementation of the prescriptions of the law that are named began only after the possession of Canaan. (Hearing and studying the Torah constitutes the presupposition of practicing it; therefore, the former is more important than the latter.)*
    - *c. Babylonian Talmud, the elders sat with each other in the upper room of Nitzah in Lydda. The following question was raised before them, “Is study or action (practicing the Torah) greater?” R. Tarfon answered and said, “Action is greater.” R. Aqiba answered and said, “Study is greater.” Then all answered and said, “Study is greater; for study leads to action Deut 5:1 shows that action depends on study, and not that study depends on action.*
- The Greek word for “Great” or “Greater” is *Megas*. In Matthew 18, the comparative form of the adjective is used, thus rendering is “greater.” Though, it is used in a manner that suggest the superlative, “greatest.” They are asking who among the 12 is “greater” but context suggests (and parallel discussions in the other gospels confirm) they want to know who is greatest of all. For other uses of *Megas* in the NT, you can look at the discussion of the “Greatest Commandment” in Matthew 22 and Mark 12.