

THE GREATEST MAN IS A HUMBLE MAN

Matthew 18:1-9

Key Verse: 18:3

"And he said: `I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

In the last passage we learned Jesus paid the temple tax. The people of Israel all abhorred the Roman Emperor's taxation. In addition to this, Jewish religious leaders levied a temple tax-two drachma a year for each person. Jesus is the Creator God. Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax, because the temple is his house, and it is the place all men worship God. It is also the place of [prayer for](#) all nations. Mark 11:17a says, "And as he taught them, he said, `Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of [prayer](#) for all nations"?"' But Jesus paid the temple tax in order to be a good example to those who were annoyed by all kinds of taxation while they were extremely poor or had no money at all. Jesus told Peter to go and throw out his line, catch a fish, open its mouth, take out a four-drachma coin, and pay the tax for Jesus and for himself. If Jesus had just paid the tax, it would have been just a good example. But Jesus also taught Peter to do so, and to go beyond his ability. In this way, Jesus taught basic Christian gospel spirit to his top disciple, Peter. In today's passage Jesus teaches his disciples who is the greatest. Let's think about who is the greatest in the kingdom of God.

First, the disciples' hegemony struggle (1). Look at verse 1. "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, `Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"' Jesus gave his life to teach his disciples about spiritual reality, especially the living hope in the kingdom of God. He also tried to teach them the meaning of his death and resurrection, through which all men can come to God's house, the kingdom of God. Peter had made a confession of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Still, the disciples were ordinary human beings more than spiritual people. In verse 1, the disciples' short question summarizes world history's hegemony struggle. For seventy years, beginning when Lenin rose to power, Russia became the Soviet Union. Lenin's idea was based on Karl Marx's social democracy. Marx's social democracy stemmed from Heinrich Heine's thought, expressed through his poems. Actually Heine was a Jew. But Germans think of him as a German, because his poems influenced the national direction, economy and social democracy of many countries. These days Germany has fulfilled social democracy and may have the best government among all governments of the world. Actually, Germany was not established by Germans, but by Jews. Many Jewish doctors, lawyers and businessmen came to Germany, thinking that Germany was the right place to establish their own nation. At that time Germans were called "German," which comes from "Gerrman," which originally meant "barbarian." Jewish people came to Germany and established [medical schools](#), law schools, and all kinds of industrial institutions; they also taught business. At the time, communication was poor. Except for the Jews, people did not know how to communicate or exchange information with other countries. But Jewish people had a way to communicate and exchange information for business: They wrote letters diligently all over the world. Then they

exported and imported goods and products and became very rich. But Hitler wanted to hold power and become the greatest. He used the word, "patriotism." His motto was "the superiority of Deutschland." His speech power was indeed charismatic. So many Europeans followed him.

Another example is Lenin. Lenin's real name was Vladimir Ilych Ulyanov. He changed his name to Lenin. He destroyed the Tsarist government of Russia and rose to power. For 800 years Russia had been a pretty peaceful country, because the farmers produced crops in the vast land of Russia, which had ten time zones. At the beginning, Lenin wanted to practice Marxism. So he called Russia, "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." But Russia was so large that he could not propagate Marxism. In order to control the vast country, he made all the farmers' lands the possession of the state. Thus, his political power was the strongest, because possessing all the land of Russia meant that he owned not only the land, but also the lives of all the farmers. In this way he defeated all his opponents and held political hegemony. Another hegemony struggle was in the Russian Orthodox church. They became like devils when they supported Lenin's dictatorship and benefited from the government by getting what they wanted, unlimitedly.

Another example is Japan. Japan was the Samurai country. Each village was virtually a country, in which a Samurai leader governed the village-nation. Around 560 countries fought one another. If a father was cut to death by the sword of an enemy, his son's life goal was to get revenge after mastering Japanese sword-fighting. But one man, Toyotomi, enlightened his people not to fight each other, but to cooperate and make their country an international country. He was very successful in making an emperor system which unified the people.

After World War II, America, Russia and England were the nations of victory. Japan, Germany and Italy were the defeated nations. Stalin got all the benefits, dividing so many countries into two. Now Germany and Vietnam are united, but Korea is still divided into two parts. At that time Vietnam was divided into two parts: South and North, like Korea, due to President Roosevelt's dozing in his senility at the Yalta Summit Conference. France wanted to possess Vietnam as its colony and began to invade it. They made an airport called Dien Bien Phu. From there, they bombed and killed so many Vietnamese. But North Vietnam's leader, Ho Chi Minh, dug a trench around the airport and cut off air supply to Dien Bien Phu, which was the fortress of the French Air Force. Ho Chi Minh killed or captured 10,000 French soldiers in one day. So France surrendered to Vietnam. America underestimated the people of North Vietnam. America allied with South Vietnam and began to attack North Vietnam. For this, 500,000 young American soldiers were sent to Vietnam to fight. America attacked North Vietnam with a huge number of bombs for eight years. Because of this, those in America who ran the bomb industry became very rich. Still, America could not teach a lesson to the North Vietnamese and their leader, Ho Chi Minh. America's idea to support the French and to teach a lesson to North Vietnam was sheer arrogance. We cannot tell the result of this war in detail, but two things are obvious: America cannot say that she won the war, and America could not teach a lesson to the North Vietnamese. Why did this happen? The root cause was a hegemony struggle. America wanted to show off as the most powerful nation and teach the North

Vietnamese that they should not defeat France, which was an allied nation of America during World War II.

Hegemony struggle seems to be sinful man's master passion. Once, a man who grew up sorrowfully, without seeing his mother's face, received an honorary doctoral degree in literature from his alma mater. During the ceremony, the one who received the honorary doctoral degree looked honorable and gave a speech to encourage professors and students. There were two persons who cried from the beginning of the ceremony to the end. One was the recipient's wife. The other was his older brother. His wife cried out of joy and thanks to God. After the ceremony, the recipient thanked his older brother for crying during the ceremony. Then his older brother shouted, "You are so honorable! You are a doctor! But I am so miserable for having no achievement." The hegemony struggle can exist even among brothers. It is indeed a sorrowful story, more sorrowful than the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States of America.

Of course, the disciples had left everything and followed Jesus for almost three years. They were educated by the Son of God. But in their sinful human nature, engaging in a power struggle to be number one was in their hearts. Peter was the one who made a confession of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Now he, together with the other disciples, are asking Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (1) They needed to repent of their hegemony struggle so that they might be called children of God and possess the kingdom of God.

Second, how to overcome the desire for hegemony struggle (2-6). The tragedy of history has been man's struggle for hegemony. The disciples' problem was the same. They were nice disciples of Jesus, chosen and disciplined to be future leaders of the world. But it seemed impossible for them to overcome the desire for hegemony struggle. Still, Jesus had a hope that they would overcome the desire for hegemony struggle.

Look at verses 2 and 3. "He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'" In these verses Jesus teaches that we must be like children; otherwise we cannot possess the kingdom of God. The deeper meaning is that if we possess a nation, we cannot possess Jesus and his everlasting house, that is, the kingdom of God. Clearly, those who are full of desire for hegemony struggle can be rich men with no souls and leaders of nations among terrible opponents. We have had a sorrowful and bitter national experience for the last several years while Republicans and Democrats have struggled for power. I wonder if a political fighter can be called a child of God or enter the kingdom of God. We must have immediate insight, and at the same time, insight to our final destination. Our immediate insight is how to be successful in this world. Insight to our final destination is to see the kingdom of God. This is the universal truth, and it is invincible. Therefore, Jesus gave his disciples a brief teaching that they should be like little children.

What are little children like? We know very well. They are too beautiful to look at. One time I went to St. Gregory's school to look

for my daughter. Not only was my daughter there, but also many other young boys and girls. I shouted, "What angels! They are angels!" I asked my daughter, "What was your main topic of gossip?" She answered, "Well, it might be envying excellent students, or crying many tears after reading good books." Children are beautiful, too beautiful to look at. Last Saturday afternoon we had a competition among twelve musical ensembles with instruments of all kinds. Many things were going on in the minds of the children who participated. Mostly, they wanted to know whether their parents came or not. After the performance, each of them went to his or her parents to find out their opinion, and they valued it more than the judge's. Children love their parents when they are young. Children are obedient to their parents. Children listen to their parents. Children's problem is that their parents do not have time to listen to them. Most of all, children are very humble. They listen to their parents and obey them. In short, children are humble.

Jesus' teaching to be like children and to overcome the desire for hegemony struggle is clear. In order to be a child of God and a member of the kingdom of God, not to mention a disciple of Jesus, one must be humble. We can understand what Jesus said in light of what we studied about those who suffered and died in their struggle to rise to power. Their main characteristics are selfishness and a proud mind. Actually, selfishness and a proud mind are the same when we analyze them philosophically. Lenin was very selfish. He didn't mind that tens of millions of farmers in Russia lost their land so that he could own it all. So he was selfish. And he abused his power beyond measure. He was not like a little child. He was like the horrible monster Dracula, who appeared just once in twenty centuries. He cannot enter the kingdom of God. He will go to the kingdom of the devil, which is a bottomless pit and very hot.

Why is humbleness so mighty? It is endless to talk about it. But we can see as an example Shepherd Moses. Moses was a man of destiny. When he was born, his people were in Egypt as slaves. As they increased in number, the king of Egypt was a little uneasy. So he issued an edict to kill all the newborn baby boys of the Israelites. At that time, Moses was born. He was kept in his mother's cradle. But when he made noise, his mother and family members could not but throw him into the Nile River. His basket was well-made. When he was thrown into the water, he did not die. By God's providence, he suddenly became the Prince of Egypt when the Egyptian Pharaoh's daughter drew him out of the water. His name "Moses" means "drew him out." Moses lived in the palace and received the highest education in oratory, philosophy, astronomy, and princely manner. In addition, his martial arts ability made him superior to everybody in leading the Egyptian army. He was nursed by his own mother through the help of his sister. One day Moses made a decision. Hebrews 11:24-26 says, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." Because of his decision, God began to train him as a shepherd of Israel. The training was not easy. God brought him to the Midianite desert where a grandpa lived with his seven daughters. There Moses shepherded the old man Jethro's sheep---not one or two days, but for forty years in the heat of the day,

and in the pouring rain. This shepherd training took forty years. When his training was over, Moses was eighty years old. It was time for him to go to heaven to rest. Another difficulty in the time of training was his six sisters-in-law. Because of their endless talking, they made him almost sleepless for forty years. In this way, God lowered Moses from an Egyptian prince to a desert shepherd. He might have been crying, saying, "Mommy! Mommy! I miss you. I want to go to heaven to rest."

Moses really wanted to go to heaven and rest, because he was dead tired and weary and thought he had lived enough. Then suddenly one morning, fire appeared in a bush, but the bush did not burn up. From the bush God called, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Ex 3:4-10).

Moses wanted to cry a little, thinking of his mom in his old age, and go to heaven and rest. But God called him as a shepherd of Israel. That was too much. He was very reluctant to become a shepherd for his suffering people. But he humbled himself and listened to God's voice at the cost of his life. He was sure that he would be killed if he went back to Egypt. But he went. It was because he did not depend on his ability; he depended on God Almighty. He challenged King Pharaoh of Egypt. God was with him. Finally he could bring 600,000 Israelites out of Egypt and into the desert. They were happy when they were freed from their slavery. They were happy when they crossed the Red Sea as on dry land. They were happy when the fortress of Jericho fell down, making a thunderous sound. But when they thought about their secure lifestyle in Egypt, where they were provided with apartments, kitchens with stoves, they felt sorry. Even if they had to do hard labor, they wanted to go back to Egypt. They didn't like to pioneer. They didn't want to be trained as God's chosen people. So they complained to Moses: "Why did you bring us here? Were there no graves in Egypt?" (Ex 14:11) Once his sister Miriam became jealous of Moses' powerful leadership. She agitated people and instigated a rebellion against Moses. The Israelites humiliated Moses, complained about him and abused him. Finally they wanted to stone him to death. Then Moses took a prayer position on the ground and didn't say anything. So the writer of Numbers says, "(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)" (Nu 12:3) Moses was indeed a humble man who was worthy of obtaining the kingdom of God and becoming a shepherd for 600,000 rebellious sheep. When we think about Miriam, it is funny that even a woman has the desire for hegemony struggle. But Moses was different.

When we think about Jesus' humbleness, it is indeed amazing. Jesus is the Creator God. Without him, nothing was made that has been made (Jn 1:3). Therefore, he could have erased all sinful mankind, as a painter erases his canvas to draw a more creative picture. He could have harshly dealt with human beings. But he gave up his power and glory and his righteousness as God, and came down to this world. He was born in a stable and laid in a manger. This humbleness is full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14). Because of his incarnation, he can be our Shepherd and Savior. His humbleness extended to Levi the tax collector. His humbleness extended to an isolated prostitute, the Samaritan woman. His humbleness extended to proud Nicodemus to give him the most famous word of God. It is John 3:16. It says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

In history, there was a most proud person whose name was Saul, meaning "the greatest." Saul was the first man who called himself "the greatest." The second was Mohammed Ali. Saul persecuted the newly-rising gospel work in the Galilean district. The ritualistic Jews who held power felt threatened, so they wanted to do away with Jesus' people. Saul volunteered to be their ring leader. He was on the way to Damascus to arrest and kill Christians. But the Risen Christ chose him to be the shepherd for the Gentiles, because Jewish people---even though they were chosen people---became like old wineskins, totally useless. The old wineskin Jews treated the Gentiles like animals. In order to save the Gentiles and other people of the world, the Risen Christ chose this dangerous man. After seeing the Risen Christ, Saul was completely changed. When he fell down from his horse, he was blinded. But our Risen Lord sent Ananias to help him. Ananias said, "O Lord, he is a dangerous man," trembling and shedding cold sweat on his back. But the Risen Christ said to Ananias in Acts 9:15,16: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." The Risen Christ was so humble that he could choose the most proud person in history as his chosen instrument for the sake of world evangelism.

In his old age, Paul said in Philippians 2:5-8: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death---even death on a cross." Paul won converts in many nations of the times. He loved new Christians like his own children. He did not pay expensive college tuition for his own children, but he gave generously to and cared for all the Gentiles who were converted in Christ Jesus. He was happy to die in Christ. So he said in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." I don't know whether he went to Rome by boat or by swimming. Anyway, he went to Rome and wanted to conquer the Roman Empire by teaching the Bible one-to-one. At best, he taught the Bible to the prison guards and to the old Jews who had come to Rome before him, whenever they came according to one-to-one appointments. He had been such a proud man. How could he teach the Bible to a Roman prison guard? The old Jews who came to Rome were clever, and a sample of old wineskins. But he taught them the Bible. In other words, Paul was an

extremely humble man. As mentioned, Moses was a humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. He was the most humble person in the Old Testament. If we choose the most humble man in the New Testament, it is Paul. Paul, when he became humble because of the Risen Christ's grace, also humbled himself to others unlimitedly in order to introduce Jesus to them.

Proud men can cause much trouble to others. But humble men share the humbleness and happiness of Jesus at any time. Therefore we must become humble men. Look at verses 5-6. Jesus said, "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Third, the punishment of selfish people (7-9). Look at verse 7. "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin. Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" This verse is very simple. Selfish men think, "Mine is mine and yours is yours." When they have money, or even if they do not have money---in any case, they are selfish. They cause much trouble to those around them. The antonym of humbleness is selfishness. A selfish person is hungry for money and power.

Look at verse 7. "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" Therefore, proud or selfish people must repent and be humble. Otherwise, they will be in the category of those who struggle for power all their lives. To cause damage or trouble to others is not a small matter. So Jesus said in verse 8, "If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire." Proud and selfish people may not accept these words of Jesus. But it is good to accept Jesus' word and his warning. In verse 9, our Lord Jesus Christ stresses this warning: "And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell." If you have a difficult problem and need to gouge out your eyes, please do it by faith and wear dark sunglasses, so that you may enter God's eternal house.

Today we thought about man's endless selfishness and proud mind and how to solve this problem. May God bless you to take this passage seriously and set your life direction. Without life direction, you don't know what you are doing. Without life direction, life is not normal. I pray that you may be children of God and possess God's eternal house instead of being put into eternal fire, the fire of hell. Don't think your body is everything. You have God's life in you, and you are a soul. May God bless you.