
Discipleship of the King

1. Intro

- One thing we often love to do is compare people or things to see who is greater
- Happens every year on our radio stations with the countdown of the 100 greatest ever rock songs ... and we wonder whether it will be
 - Imagine, Bohemian Rhapsody, Stairway to Heaven
- Or we debate ...
 - Who was the greatest rugby league player
 - Wally Lewis, Andrew Johns, or Jonathan Thurston
 - Who is the greatest actor
 - John Wayne, Meryl Streep or Morgan Freeman
- And it provides for interesting discussion after church, during a car ride or at a BBQ

- Well in our passage today ... the disciples come and ask Jesus who “will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”
- And while you and I debating who is the greatest rock guitarist, pop singer, or cricketer is a fairly harmless discussion
- The debate the disciples are having is much more serious and concerning
- Because what it exposes is a problem that is at the heart of every human being
- And the consequences for you and I are infinitely more significant than whether or not one person or the next tops the charts or a twitter poll

2. Radical Reassessment

- If you're new or visiting ...
- Jesus has come to inaugurate the KoH through his death and resurrection
- In Matthew 14-18 Jesus is repeatedly demonstrating and teaching that he is the King of God's kingdom and what's required to be part of his kingdom
- And this leads to an inevitable clash of kingdoms
 - On the one hand, this clashes with the worldview of the secular leaders and religious leaders who are in opposition to Jesus and his kingdom
 - On the other hand, Jesus teaching continues to clash with the worldview of the disciples
 - They still need to have their misunderstandings about Jesus and what it means to follow him, realigned
- This is because the disciples are struggling to understand what it means for Jesus to be the Christ

- They were expecting a warrior or political king
- And Jesus needs to teach them that as the Christ he must suffer and die
- So, there's this clash of understanding about what it means for Jesus to be the Christ
- But there is also a clash of kingdoms going on within the hearts of the disciples about what it means for them to follow the Christ ... what it means to be a disciple in Jesus kingdom
- And we see that clearly in v1 when they come to Jesus and ask
 - "Who will be the greatest in the KOH"

- Where's this coming from?
- Mark and Luke's Gospels tell us the disciples had been arguing amongst themselves as to who was the greatest ... and so they've come to Jesus to get a definitive answer
- It seems like the reason they're having this argument ... is
 - They have finally realised (16:16) that Jesus is the Christ
 - Peter, James and John have just witnessed Jesus transfigured in all his glory
 - And so they're thinking the Messianic kingdom was just around the corner
 - And they're wondering who's going to get the top spot alongside Jesus when it all happens
 - They want to know who's going to be Jesus' Vice President or Deputy PM
 - Will it be Peter, James, John or someone else?

- What it reveals is the disciples have
 - no idea at all what the KOH was about
 - no idea about what it means to be a disciple in Jesus kingdom

- And so Jesus takes the opportunity to teach them what discipleship in the kingdom looks like
- And to do that Jesus calls little child and has him stand among them ... and he said to the disciples
 - "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

- Jesus point here is that the disciples need to **radically reassess** what it means to be a disciple in the KOH
 - They think it's all about greatness and power and rank and significance

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- And Jesus is saying here ... it's the exact opposite ... it's about humility
 - The point he is making by having the child stand among them ... is not because children are innocent or pure in any way
 - If you've had anything to do with children ... you'll know this is not the case!
 - He does it because of the lowly importance and significance children had in C1st world
 - This was very different to today's world where children are often put up on a pedestal and idolized and fussed over
 - But in Jesus day ... children were to be seen and not heard
 - They were unimportant
 - They couldn't fight or lead
 - They couldn't acquire wisdom or build riches
 - They counted for very little
 - They were had no rank or position or status or significance
 - And Jesus is saying ...
 - unless you change (lit. turn)
 - unless you turn
 - unless you completely reassess your values
 - and become like little children ... you will **never** enter the KOH
 - In other words, Jesus is saying
 - Unless you (metaphorically or literally) get on your knees before Jesus
 - and acknowledge before him
 - you have no rank or position or status of significance in his kingdom ...
 - you can **never** even enter into it
 - Unless you completely change your mindset
 - Unless you flip your worldview upside down
 - Unless you totally revise your attitude
 - ... you **won't ever** be disciples in the kingdom
 - The flip side to what Jesus is saying is there in v4
 - *Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*
 - The person
 - Who does humble themselves before God
 - Who does recognise they come to him with nothing
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- Who gets down on their knees before God acknowledging they have not status or position or can bring nothing to earn their place in the KOH
- **That person** is the greatest ... because they are a true disciple who has entered into kingdom
- **Illustration – Refugee**
- Like a refugee who comes across the seas with nothing in their hands
- Stripped of all dignity, all status, all significance, all rank and honour
- And says to the country in which they are seeking refuge ...
 - “have mercy on me ... I have nothing to offer ... I am here stripped of everything”
- v4 - whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest
- Without humility it is impossible to even get into the Kingdom

Application

- Do you see the irony here?
 - If you think you’re great ... you’ll never get in
 - If you realise you’re not great ... Jesus says you’re the greatest in the KOH
- This is because the KOH is completely the opposite of what our world values and says is important
- KOH not like earthly kingdoms
 - Jesus kingdom is an upside-down kingdom
 - He totally turns our ideas of greatness on its head
- Our world says you are great ... you are valuable ... you are significant if you are
 - Popular
 - Successful
 - Powerful
 - Intelligent
 - Beautiful
- But there’s a tragic consequence of this worldly / superficial way of thinking
 - Because almost all of us will never be great in the world’s eyes
 - The world looks at people like you and I and says ... “you’re ordinary”
 - And therefore, if it’s the world’s definition of greatness that we aspire to ... then most us are going to be left disappointed, despairing and questioning themselves and their life
- Think about it
 - What is it that drives a man to have a mid-life crisis?

- Because he gets to his 40's and looks back and thinks
 - He failed
 - He didn't achieve all he hoped to when he set out in life 25 years ago
 - His life hasn't turned out to be as successful as he thought it would
- He's not that great after all

- But thank God ... the KOH is not like that
 - What makes you great ... is when you humble yourself like a child
 - Because then you get to enter the KOH
 - And that makes you a child of God
 - And you belong to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords
 - Which means you are more valued and loved than you could ever imagine
- And far more than
 - Being a multi-millionaire
 - Thousands of Instagram followers
 - Being a company CEO
 - Successful sporting career

- But it starts when you come humbly before Jesus
- Because when you do ... he confers on you this extraordinary and exalted privilege of the greatest in the kingdom

3. Radical Responsibility

- In v1-4 Jesus says if you're going to be a disciple in my kingdom ...
 - You need to make a radical reassessment of yourself
- In v5-7 he says if you're going to be a disciple in my kingdom ...
 - You have a radical responsibility to uphold

- In these verses Jesus changes the way he speaks of little children
 - Previously he the child was an illustration of humility
 - Now he switches to speak of a little child as anyone who believes in me (v6)
 - Little children are true disciples of Jesus who humble themselves and believe in him
 - So he's speaking about the believer

- The other thing to realise in these next few verses is the phrase "to cause to sin" ... literally means
 - *Cause to stumble*
 - *Because of stumbling blocks*
- Let me read v5-7 in light of that and see the responsibility of a disciple

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- ⁵ "And whoever welcomes a little child (a believer) like this in my name welcomes me. ⁶ But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to [stumble] 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. ⁷ "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to [stumble] sin! Such [stumbling blocks] things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!
 - And Jesus point here is that part of being a disciple of Jesus means welcoming all believers just like Jesus welcomed the little child
 - There's two reasons for this
 - First is because ... any person who's humbled themselves and is following Jesus is according the Jesus ... the greatest in the kingdom
 - They're not welcomed because they're
 - Popular
 - Successful
 - Powerful
 - Intelligent
 - Beautiful
 - But because they're the greatest in the kingdom
 - They're a child of God ... part of the Kingdom and a true disciple of Christ
 - Secondly, such a person is to be welcomed because when you do you are welcoming Jesus
 - In other words, ... a Christian person is like an ambassador representing Christ
 - So, in the same way that to welcome the ambassador to the US would be to welcome President Trump
 - Or to insult the ambassador to the US would be to insult President Trump
 - Careful! Response?!?
 - When you welcome a believer into your midst ... you welcome Jesus
 - And conversely ... if you cause them to stumble it would be better to have a large stone hung around your neck and be drowned
 - And the reason Jesus is so serious about this ... is because to cause them to stumble and not welcome ... is to not welcome Jesus
 - To reject the believer is to reject Jesus
 - What's Jesus mean when he's talking about causing to stumble
 - In the context of
 - v1 where the disciples are puffing themselves up and asking Jesus "who's the greatest?"
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- v10 where Jesus warns the disciples "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones."
 - It seems that causing little ones to stumble ... is acting in such a way of proud self-importance that I
 - Ignore them
 - Despise them
 - Isolate them
 - Reject them
 - And as a result ... they give up ... and walk away from Jesus
 - And therefore, I'm a stumbling block to them following Jesus
 - It's very easy and comfortable to welcome those who are like me
 - Same
 - Stage of life
 - ethnicity
 - education
 - socio-economic background
 - It's very easy and comfortable to welcome those who
 - Are interesting, funny, good looking
 - Seem to have it together
 - But Jesus is saying ... it doesn't matter if its
 - Hugh Jackman or a homeless person
 - Managing director or receptionist
 - Charismatic life of the party or social introvert
 - Principal or cleaner
 - All who come in the name of Jesus are to be welcomed
 - Because in Jesus kingdom they're the greatest
 - They belong the King
 - They matter to him
 - **Passport Illustration**
 - In our passports the inside cover says
 - *The governor general of the Commonwealth of Australia being the representative in Australia of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the second, requests all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer, that's main, an Australian citizen, to pass freely without let or hindrance into afford him or her every assistance in protection of which he or she may stand in need.*
 - Your passport says to every border security officer that as a citizen of Australia you matter and are valued
 - Jesus is saying here ... that citizens of the KOH ... matter to him ... and therefore they must matter to you and me
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Application

- What's it look like to welcome others
- Welcome = Lit receive or accept
- It means to receive or accept the believer
 - into your fellowship
 - into your church
 - into your youth group
 - into your circle
- regardless of
 - who they are
 - how different they are to you

- Welcoming at C@P
 - Pretty good
 - Many people who are new to C@P comment how welcoming and friendly people are here at C@P
- However ... welcoming is
 - much more than what we do as a church for the first time or second time visitor
 - much more than a warm welcome at the front gate and a coffee or bacon and egg roll
- We continue welcoming others until they become an integrated member of C@P
 - Relationally connected
 - In a GG
 - On board with our mission of living to be and make disciples

- We were talking about this passage in staff meeting this week and Tom made the helpful observation that given we're a church mostly of young families or young adults ... its much more likely people will feel welcomed if they fit into those demographics
 - But it's harder you don't
- Without meaning to embarrass anyone ... our young people are those we need to especially welcome
 - Our youth come into church in Year 9
 - No longer part of Kids Church, not yet in an adult growth group
 - They're no longer cute kids 😊
 - Very easy for them to get lost, be ignored, looked down upon
- All the intergenerational research says they are at the most crucial stage of the Christian life
 - Many stumble at this point and walk away
- The research says ...
 - when young people are welcomed in by older adults

- remember their name
- include them in their circle
- share their life and wisdom with them
 - They're much more like to stick than to stumble

- We need to be just as intentional in welcoming those who are single, divorced, widowed or aged
- They matter to Jesus ... and they must matter to you and me

- How do you do welcome others?
- Lots of little things
- But it's interesting that word 'welcome' in the original also mean 'to show hospitality'
- One of the most profound things you can do to welcome someone is to share food with them
 - Have them over for lunch or brunch or dinner
 - While it's popular and cool and modern to go out for dinner or coffee
 - There's something unique about inviting people into your home
 - Because when you have people in your home ...
 - You're being vulnerable
 - You're opening your house and family and life to be scrutinized
 - There's a necessary humility that says
 - You're welcome in my home
 - I'm willing to let you get beyond the front door of my life and our fellowship

- That's why we encourage Hospitality Sunday here at C@P
 - We want to help encourage a culture of welcoming all who come in the name of Jesus
 - And not be a stumbling block to them because they've been left on the outer
- Because such a person is the greatest
 - They belong to the king
 - They matter to him
 - And therefore, they must matter to you and me

4. Radical Resolve (v-8-9)

- So Jesus is teaching that discipleship of the king requires a
 - Radical reassessment – put aside your pride and come humbly before Jesus
 - Radical responsibility – welcome all who come in Jesus name
- It also requires a radical resolve ... and we see that in v8-9

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- Here Jesus moves on from warning us about causing **others** to stumble ... to warning us about anything that might cause **me** to stumble
 - And here in v8, Jesus uses hyperbole ... that is ... he deliberately overstates the point ... in order to get us to see how serious and radical Jesus wants us to be on this issue
 - And his point is having a radical resolve to cut off all traces of pride
 - He is not urging us to cut off the members of a body
 - If that was the case we would have no parts of a body left!
 - Be like the Black Knight in Monty Python – “Tis but a flesh wound”!
 - Verse 8
 - *⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble / 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.*
 - *⁹ And if your eye causes you to stumble / 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.*
 - Again ... given the context it seems the particular stumbling block that Jesus is getting at here is pride
 - That thinks of ourselves greater than others (v1); or
 - v10 ... that looks down on someone else
 - And Jesus says ...
 - Whatever it is
 - Whatever is causing it
 - Whatever is feeding it
 - Cut it off ... resolve to deal radically with it
 - Don't pretend you can do it by mere will power ... or trying harder
 - Take whatever action you need to ... to stop yourself from stumbling
 - Flee from it!
 - And if you think in the scheme of things ... pride is not that serious
 - Well Jesus doesn't think so
 - Because he says ... it will be your pride that will keep you from entering the KOH and spending eternity in hell
 - But here's the problem
 - The thing that feeds our pride is our heart
 - Jesus says Matt 15:19 that it is out of the heart come all our sinful desires and the things that cause us to stumble
 - If that's true ... then how can we cut out our heart
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- We can't!
- Be our hearts can be changed
 - And it's when you and I look to Jesus
 - That even those he **is the** greatest in the kingdom
 - He humbled himself ... an became obedient to death
 - Even death on a cross (Phil 2:8)
- The King of the Kingdom not only showed us what humility looks like ... he humbled himself for us
 - He did it so that prideful people like you and I might enter the KOH
 - Not because of our greatness
 - But because he put aside his greatness ...
 - So that those who humble themselves before him will become the greatest in the kingdom
- And friends ... when you see and understand that Christ would do that for you
 - That will break down your pride
 - And bring you to your to your knees
- Because what does the cross tell you?
 - It tells me that I have nothing to bring before Jesus that makes me worthy of being the greatest
 - It reminds me that there's no place for pride because I'm just as broken, and sinful and in need of saving from hell as the person next to me
- So how can I be proud when I Jesus humbled himself for me?
- And so we flee from the stumbling blocks of pride
- And we run toward the cross
 - The cross of humility; and
 - The cross of our saviour

5. Conclusion

- And so when it comes to greatness ...
- Jesus says only I can make you great
- If you think you are great in your own eyes ... then you cannot enter the KOH
- Instead ... you need realise you need a
 - Radical reassessment ... that I need to put aside my pride and come humbly before Jesus
- You have a

- Radical responsibility – I am called on to welcome all who come in Jesus name because they matter to him
- You need a
 - Radical resolve ... to flee from the pride that causes me to stumble and run to the cross of Jesus

PRAY