

19th March 2023

Isaiah 6:1-13

Isaiah's Commission

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ *"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."*

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said,

"See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

⁸ *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"*

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

⁹ He said, "Go and tell this people:

"Be ever hearing, but never understanding;
be ever seeing, but never perceiving."

¹⁰ Make the heart of this people calloused;
make their ears dull
and close their eyes.

Otherwise, they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.”

¹¹ Then I said, “For how long, Lord?”

And he answered:

“Until the cities lie ruined

and without inhabitant,

until the houses are left deserted

and the fields ruined and ravaged,

¹² until the Lord has sent everyone far away

and the land is utterly forsaken.

¹³ And though a tenth remains in the land,

it will again be laid waste.

But as the terebinth and oak

leave stumps when they are cut down,

so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.”

Matthew 18:1-14

The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

² He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³ And

he said: *“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little*

children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever

takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of

heaven.

⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Causing to Stumble

⁶ “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung

around their 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! Such

things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!

⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, 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, 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.

The Parable of the Wandering Sheep

¹⁰ "See that you do not despise one of these little ones.

For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

¹² "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ *In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.*

Greatness in the Kingdom (Isaiah 6:1-13 & Matthew 18:1-14) 19-Feb-2023

G'Day Church Family

Please have your Bibles in front of you – opened at Matthew 18:1-14

There's the usual **outline** for you to **take notes** – if that helps you **concentrate**.

Let me ask **God** for His **help** and **guidance** first – let's **pray**...

Intro/Context (Matthew 18:1)

I think it's fair to say we live in a **world** where we **look up to greatness** – and **many people aspire to be great**. We look up to **sports stars [G.O.A.T.s]**, **celebrities, music and fashion idols** – and **successful and rich people**. We even have people called “**influencers**” who encourage and influence people to become great – and they have many followers online.

Even 50 years ago **John Lennon** of the Beatles said:

Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that; I'm right and I'll be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first—rock 'n' roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right but his disciples were thick and ordinary... (John Lennon March 1966)

And around about the same time – Mohammad Ali (Cassius Clay) said this:

I am the greatest. I said that even before I knew I was. I figured that if I said it enough, I would convince the world that I was really the greatest.

Is - being really good at something or being famous or successful or rich what makes us great?

I wonder if **John Lennon** and **Mohammed Ali** ever **regretted what they said?**

(pause)

Winston Churchill – made an interesting comment when someone praised him for his greatness. *Someone asked Winston Churchill: "Doesn't it thrill you to know that every time you make a speech, the hall is packed to overflowing?" He replied "It's quite flattering - but whenever I feel that way, I always remember that if instead of making a political speech I was going to be hanged, the crowd would be twice as big."*

We can see that **Winston** as great as he was – realized that being great is not all it's purported to be – and **perhaps a better way forward is to have humility**

A fair definition of humility is “*not just thinking lowly or meanly of yourself but rather not thinking too much of yourself at all*”.

If we're going around saying “**how humble am I**” then we're probably not that humble!

(pause)

As I was preparing this week – **I read of a minister who said he had a wonderful sermon on humility** but he was waiting for a much larger congregation before preaching it?

(pause)

In our NT reading from Matthew 18 this morning

Jesus' disciples get bogged down in the idea of being great

[Slide 1 – Question]

And they **come to him** with the **question** in verse 1 “*Who, then is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven*”

It's worth pausing and reflecting on **WHY** the **disciples ask this question**

- The **12 disciples** have been **specialy chosen** and have already been given power to drive out impure spirits and heal diseases and sickness (Matthew 10:1) – so they are **feeling pretty good about themselves**
- 3 of the disciples **Peter, James and John**, have just been up a **mountain** with Jesus – where they met **Moses and Elijah** – and **heard God speak** to them (Matthew 17:1-13). And Jesus **told** these 3 disciples that **John the Baptist is the new Elijah**.

- **Peter** has been **singled out a few times**. He has **walked on water** (Matthew 14); He's **identified Jesus as the Messiah** and Jesus has told Peter he **will be instrumental in establishing Jesus' Church** (Matthew 16). And last week Jesus performed a miracle to get the **coin from a fish so that Peter could pay the Temple tax** (Matthew 17:24-27)
- So, if we put all that together – the disciples might be wondering who is the greatest? Moses? Elijah? John the Baptist? One of the 3 that went up the mountain? Or is it, Peter? Or one of the other disciples?
- In fact, they were **so preoccupied about greatness** – according to Mark and Luke's version of the same story – **they even argued about it!**

But in this passage - Jesus identifies that the disciples' **attitude** is **all wrong**
Jesus reverses conventional human values – and **turns things upside down!**
 And He gives **four things** **that are needed for greatness** in the Kingdom of Heaven

[Slide 2-Heading]

Has to be a change of attitude about self (Matthew 18:2-4 & Isaiah 6:1-13)

[Slide 2a-ourself]

1st to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven – there has to be a **change of attitude about ourself** – that's verses 2 to 4

Jesus **uses** a little **child** as an **example** in verse 2

And in verse 3 He says - *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

The **disciples were preoccupied with their status and position** – but Jesus is about to show that greatness in the Kingdom is characterised by humility and dependency.

A little child – say a **Kindergarten kid** – is not concerned about their status – they are **totally dependent on others** - to supply food, clothing, shelter and warmth – and they **never doubt these things.**

A little child **depends on their parents and teacher for everything** – it's the **grown-ups** in their lives who **decide meal times, events for the day and bedtimes.**

When **at school** – a little **child** – is **like a sponge** – **accepting every word, their teacher says without questioning.** At that young age – **they rarely ask “why?”** – **they just accept** – and - **they are totally teachable.**

That's what the disciples and us must be like in Jesus' Kingdom – **humble, dependent on God** – and **teachable and accepting of everything Jesus teaches.**

Verse 4 says – we need to **take on the lowly position of a child.**

We need to **jettison our own plans and agendas** – and become totally dependent on God.

In our Old Testament reading from Isaiah chapter 6 – Isaiah is caught up in a vision of God's Throne room – and Isaiah **realizes what a lowly position he has compared to God!** And Isaiah **realizes his uncleanness compared to God's holiness.** And he cries out in verse 5 *“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”*

We are in the same unclean state as Isaiah – so we need to **stop kidding ourselves about being great** – and realise **we can only be clean through Jesus** – and then **ditch our pride and our ego**.

There can be no ego in Jesus' Kingdom or in His Church! Where there is ego in His church – **there are always problems!**

In Christian living “the way up is down, and the way down is up”.

As Jesus says later in Matthew 23:12 says - *those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*

So, the first ingredient in true greatness is to **be completely disinterested in greatness and to humbly live in dependency in God and in the service of others!** That's what Isaiah did – when God sent him to preach to people who would not listen – Isaiah had complete dependency on God!

Has to be a change of attitude about society (Matthew 18:5)

[Slide 2b-society]

2nd - to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven – there has to be a **change of attitude about society** – see v5

Jesus says “*whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*”

As Christians we **represent Christ's name**.

So, we **must welcome people** in Christ's name.

The **Greek** word for **welcome** literally means “*receive into our family*” – basically **treat them like family**.

We receive or welcome people like we would a little child – **a little child can't do anything for us** – we serve them – don't we?

In the same way – Jesus is saying – we welcome people – with the view of what we can do for them – not what they can do for us

I heard someone criticizing a church [not this church] – the church seemed to attract “social misfits” and “odd” people – the person criticizing felt this was an embarrassment and a hindrance to the effectiveness of the church and its outreach.

The fact is - **Jesus is saying the reverse is true!**

The measure of greatness in the kingdom will be evident in how people who often experience rejection find themselves welcomed, loved and made part of the family of God.

True greatness in the kingdom comes from the attitude to others that does not measure others worth by their social or economic standing, or by their education, their mental health, their age, their weight, the colour of their skin, the clothes they wear or the skills they have – but instead loves and cares for others - simply because they exist!

If Jesus welcomes everyone, so should we. All are welcome!

Has to be a change of attitude to sin (Matthew 18:6-9)

[Slide 2c-Sin]

3rd - to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven – there has to be a **change of attitude to sin** – that’s verses 6 to 9

In the world we live in – temptation to sin is always there.

But Jesus warns in verses 6 and 7 – that **it is a terrible thing for someone to cause a little one – one of his believers – to be tripped up and sin.**

So, part of growing in Jesus' kingdom means **we need to have a different attitude to sin** – not only avoiding sin ourselves – but also considering what parts of our behaviour and society cause others to sin!

Jesus then gets personal in verses 8 and 9 – and says if our hands, feet or eyes cause us to sin – then **we need to remove them** – rather than end up in Hell because of continued sin!

This is not literal [although in some Middle Eastern countries – hands are chopped off for stealing]. If I cut my right hand off, I can still sin with my left hand - even if I cut all my limbs off and cut my eyes out, I can still sin in my heart and in my thoughts. {Remember how Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that we can murder people in our hearts}

What Jesus is saying is **to eliminate sin, we need to bring our body under control.** Remember the **fruit of the Spirit includes self-control.** There needs to be a **total transformation from the inside out;** i.e., spiritual surgery to remove the parts of us that sin!

It's **worth us doing a self-examination** this morning...

In what ways is our behaviour potentially corrupting others? Is it our language? Our anger? Are we being a hypocrite – saying we follow the Bible's teaching but we don't actually do it? Are we a stumbling block to others? We are **meant to be a stepping stone, so they can come to Jesus!**

What do we need to remove from our lives that tempt us or cause us to habitually sin?

Which of the fruit of the spirit are we falling short on – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?

The **Apostle Paul** (Romans 7:15-25) – **describes the battle he has with sin** –

Paul says he does what he shouldn't do and doesn't do what he should do.

It's a bit like two dogs inside us fighting – a **good dog** and a **bad dog** – the dog that wins the fight – is **the dog we feed** – are we feeding the good dog or the bad dog? **Feeding the good dog** – means **feeding on God's word and becoming more like Jesus!**

Has to be a change of attitude to service (Matthew 18:10-14)

[Slide 4d-Service]

4th - to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven – there has to be a **change of attitude to service** – that's verses 10 to 14?

Instead of focusing on themselves – Jesus tells the disciples in v10 just how important every little one – **every believer is.** They should not despise even one of His little ones.

They are so precious Jesus says – still in verse 10 – that **God has even assigned angels to them.** **Angels** work for God and have the job as His **messengers** and as **protectors** of His little ones.

How encouraging is it for us to know that God has assigned angels to us?

(pause)

To illustrate how important His little ones are, **Jesus** then tells a **parable** in verses 12 to 14.

In the parable – a **shepherd left the ninety-nine safe sheep to search for the lost one until it is found!** This is a **picture of what God is like** – as v14 says –

God is not willing that any of His little ones should perish.

This is an attitude to service that has no boundaries. It's not about the one serving but **always about those being served.** The sheep are **everything** to the shepherd!

Because of the disciples super close relationship with Jesus – they had been caught up in His greatness – and they were in danger of **only thinking** about their **own greatness** and **nothing else!**

Jesus cuts to the core of their hearts and says **everyone matters to God.** They need to dump their pride and arrogance and **replace it with true humility** – by **having a genuine concern for all those in need** and a **genuine concern for even one person lost from God.**

The point is – if God/Jesus cares for even one sheep in trouble – **shouldn't we have the same concern and care?**

If someone in our church family is sick – **isn't that our concern too?**

If someone in our church family is grieving – **shouldn't that be our concern too?**

In our small groups here at church – **are we caring for each member in the group** – do we follow up – if one member has been absent?

If someone hasn't been to church for six weeks – **do we just shrug our shoulders and say – ah well? They could be sick? They could be discouraged? They could be struggling spiritually? Even if we don't know what to say – shouldn't we alert someone?**

[Plug – [pastoral care workshop](#)]

If someone seems to have given up on God – **doesn't this parable say – God wants us to care – even about that one person lost?**

Doesn't this parable say **we search for those lost from God?**

And how do we feel when someone is lost from God? Do we shed a tear? Are we concerned they may end up in Hell? Or is that just their problem?

[Plug – evangelism prayer meeting]

Isn't this parable saying – our attitude has to be to serve others – not serve ourselves – to be other-person centred – and not self-centred?

Conclusion (Philippians 2:5-8)

To finish up then – the bottom line is – **there is only ONE who is great – that's Jesus** - and the Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 2:5-8 – that **we do well to have the same mindset and same attitude of Jesus.**

Let's finish by reading what Paul says:

[Slide 3-Phil 2:5-8]

⁵ *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

⁶ *Who, being in very nature God,*

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ *rather, he made himself nothing*

by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man,*

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

Friends – Jesus left the glory of Heaven and humbled himself to death on a cruel cross – so we could be forgiven of our sins and enter into eternal life - we must imitate Him - and be humble servants just like our Lord Jesus – then we will be great in His Kingdom!

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, thank you that Jesus taught and modelled what true greatness is – help us to examine our attitude towards ourselves, towards society, towards sin in our lives and towards serving others. Help us to imitate Christ in all we think, say and do. In His name, we pray, Amen.