

Title: "Don't you know who I am?"  
Text: Matthew 17.24-18.6  
Theme: Meekness and humility as the key to greatness  
Series: Matthew #88  
Prop Stmtnt: Without humility one will never gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Read Text:

One day at school a boy said to a girl, "The principle is a moron." The girl said, "Do you know who I am?" The boy said, "No." She said, "I am the principle's daughter." He said, "Do you know who I am?" She said, "No." He said, "Good." And ran away.

Have you ever heard someone say, "*Do you know who I am?*" Frequently we will hear stories of famous personalities either being corrected or arrested or treated like everybody else and they get angry and say, "*Do you know who I am?*" One Hollywood actor was attending the Wimbledon tennis tournament and tried to get into the private bar that was only for the tennis players. When he was caught and turned away he said, "*Do you know who I am?*" He was escorted from the courts and told not to bother to come back.

We hear those stories and we feel a little bit of righteous indignation. We assume that famous people think of themselves as being high and mighty so when they act high and mighty and get taken down a few notches, we sort of enjoy it. Of course we think that we would never act so high and mighty. We would never pull that "*Don't you know who I am?*" card would we?

Last Saturday night, I took Cathi and Arianna out to dinner and then to hear the Detroit Symphony. I had planned this night for a while and had everything all timed out so that we would enjoy the evening at a very leisurely pace. I knew that Woodward was torn up, and so I allowed for some extra time. What I did not know was that Monster Jam was at Ford Field and Garth Brooks was performing at the Joe Louis Arena. The entire downtown was gridlocked. I have never seen things so jammed up in Detroit, ever. It was so bad, that another guy from our church was in an underground parking garage in the city that night, and waited 2.5 hours to get out. It was insane. You would wait for the lights to change and inch forward until finally you would be the next to go through when the light turned green. But, the traffic from the other direction would clog the intersection so that when it turned green, you could not go. And by the time the other traffic moved through, your light would be turning red. So, what do you do? Do you act like everybody else and pretend that the traffic laws do not apply to you? Or do you obey the law and stay where you are and never get anywhere? I decided to take some side streets, like just about everyone else I soon discovered, in order to get to a parking deck. I do not know how I did it since I think my sense of direction is pretty keen, but I managed to get back onto Woodward farther back than before. And if I wasn't already about apoplectic, Cathi is informing me, frequently I should say, that, "we really shouldn't have come this way." In my mind I am saying, "We've got tickets to the symphony and the concert is about to

begin. We've got to get there." In other words, "Don't you know who I am? I have tickets to the symphony. Doesn't that entitle me to an uneventful trip? No, it doesn't!

What are some of the ideas that people have that make them think that they are entitled?

"I am older than you."

"I have seniority."

"I am younger than you."

"I have strength and coolness."

"I have lived here longer than you?"

"I was here before you."

"I am related to an important person."

"I am an important person."

"I have more money than you."

"I am more attractive than you."

"I am smarter than you."

"I am stronger than you."

"My kids are more successful than yours."

"I went to a more prestigious school than you."

"I have traveled more than you."

"I can speak more languages than you."

"I can play music better than you."

"I can sing better than you."

"I can run faster than you."

"I can swim faster than you."

"I can bench-press Volkswagen."

"I have tickets to the symphony."

"I have season tickets."

"I play in the symphony."

"I conduct the symphony."

"I own the symphony."

And on and on it goes. The sad truth is, we all tend to find something that makes us think we are entitled to getting preferential treatment. And along comes Jesus, who is actually inherently deserving of preferential treatment and what does he do? He chooses to humble himself and act like an ordinary person in order that he might provide the only means by which we can be forgiven.

## **I. Good leaders do what they do not have to do. (17.24-27)**

### **A. The Setting**

The disciples come back to Capernaum (which is on the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee). The men charged with collecting the monies for the temple tax approach Peter and ask him about Jesus. The reason for this is because this tax was an individual tax established in Exodus 30 for the support of the Tabernacle, which was later replaced by the Temple. Each person over the age of 20 was to give a half-shekel. Now, a half-shekel was the equivalent to 2 day's wages. So, it was not a huge amount, but it was not pocket change either. The practice was re-established during the time of Nehemiah but faded away and was revived 70 years before Christ was born and generated a lot of money.

We do not know why the men approached Peter. I am guessing that they were probably asking him about his payment of the tax since that factors into the story later on. But notice how they pose the question. "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" Peter assures them that Jesus pays his taxes.

## **B. The Miracles**

There are two miracles that take place. First, Peter comes into the house where Jesus is and before he has a chance to talk to Jesus about the tax, Jesus starts to talk to him about the tax. And in a manner that is familiar to Jesus, he asks for Peter's opinion about the matter in a way that goes deeper than Peter would have imagined. "From whom do the kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?"

By the way, a great example of this is seen back in 1 Samuel 16 in the account of David and Goliath. The men in the army are saying that whoever defeats Goliath gets to marry the king's daughter (which may explain why no one wanted to fight the big guy) and his father's house is exempt from paying taxes. If the hero marries the king's daughter, then the guy and his family have just become part of the king's family. If you are in the king's family, you do not have to pay taxes.

Peter knew that and Jesus affirmed that by saying, "Then the sons are free." I believe that Jesus used the plural (sons) to indicate not only himself but Peter as well. He is calling Peter a son and is treating him like an equal. And once again we are more amazed at the heart of Jesus than we are at the miracles of Jesus. But there is something else that Jesus implies doesn't he? If you are a follower of Christ, then you are no longer obligated to pay the temple tax because the old covenant is over. Jesus is preparing Peter for the new covenant though Peter did not understand all of that at that moment. Then Jesus tells Peter to go fishing, which is sort of like telling Nathan that he has to go hunting or telling Dave that he has to read a book. But, Peter is going to catch a fish that has a shekel in its mouth. And since the tax is half a shekel per person, the shekel will be enough for him and Jesus. This second miracle is pretty remarkable isn't it? Someone had to lose a shekel. A fish had to find it and get it into its mouth, but not apparently into its stomach. The same fish was the first fish that Peter would catch.

So, while we can see more evidence for the amazing power and authority of Jesus, the most amazing thing in this account is the humility of Jesus. He is the Son of God. He is

the One that the Temple is all about. He is the glory of God who sits on the Ark of the Covenant. He is the sacrifice, the light, the incense and the bread. He is the high priest and the offering. Everything thing in the Temple points to him, yet he is willing to pay taxes even though he does not have to because if he didn't it would cause offense. So, here is the point.

### **C. The Point**

*Good leaders do what they do not have to do because they are concerned about more important matters than their "rights".*

What are some of the important matters that Jesus is concerned about?

- He is concerned that he not needlessly offends others.
- He lays down his rights as the King in order to have greater ministry opportunities.
- He is concerned about Peter (and us) learning what we are supposed to do with the authority that we are given.

So, here is Peter being called a son of the King and a brother of Jesus. In the history of our world, we assume that people who are in power will use that power for their own purposes. Jesus, however, uses his position to rescue us from our sin and he calls everyone who is a follower of his to use their position of power and influence to be more concerned about others than you are your position of power and influence. So, let's answer that question: Do you know who I am? As a follower of Christ, we could say, that we are children of the king, right? I am a child of the king. What does that mean? That means that I am called to live in a manner that reflects well on the King. I am called to honor the King by being an example of his rule and reign. How does he rule? He lays down his life for his subjects. He treats the citizens of his kingdom as treasured possessions and elevates them to rule alongside of him. That is how I am to treat those around me.

This is an unfortunate chapter division because it seems to put a break into the text where there is no break. Here is the greatest One who ever lived (Jesus) providing this amazing example of humility and care and deference only to be approached by the rest of the disciples who are asking him, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

The good news is that it is not Peter who is saying something really imprudent this time. So, let me ask the obvious question. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Obviously, the King! You cannot have a kingdom without a king! But what kind of a king is he? That is the question that Matthew's gospel is answering. Jesus is unlike any king you have ever encountered. Imagine going into the CEO's office at GM or Ford and saying, "Ok, who is in charge around here?" They would most likely be stunned, even perhaps a bit offended. Jesus, however does not respond by saying that he is the greatest in the kingdom, (which of course is true), but instead he calls a child over and set the

child in the midst of them and said that if they did not TURN and become like children, that you will never enter the kingdom. Then he said, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. His point is so clear.

## **II. Greatness is only pursued through humility. (18.1-4)**

Since they are in Capernaum and since this is where Peter lived, it is possible that they are not only in Peter's home but that this is one of Peter's kids.

### **A. Humility does not care about power and prestige.**

Kids are just happy to play with other kids. They do not care about the labels of your clothes, the education level of your parents, the amount of money that you have in the bank where you are from or the ethnicity of your family. They do not care about power and prestige. If you try to explain to them the rules of culture and how everyone has to stay in their own box, they will not understand it. They just want to have someone to play with. It is not until they get a little older and they become aware of some of the social structures of the culture and become conscious of what other people are saying that they start to look at who they associate with in a new light.

This is an enormous point that Jesus is making. For thousands of years our world has been marked by people groups who attempt to put people in their place. The rich do not marry the poor. The poor do not associate with the rich. The smart do not hang around the dull. Even the races, especially the races were told to stay in your corner. That is why Rosa Parks was so unconventional. She refused to go to "her place" in the back of the bus. But hundreds of years before Rosa Parks, Jesus said and did something that was the most radical of all. By putting this child in front of these men and calling them to repent (Turn), he was making it clear that everyone has a place in the kingdom, and that place for everyone is at the foot of the cross. Remember, the ground is level at the foot of the cross, and it doesn't matter if you have a ticket to the symphony.

This is particularly important to remember when you are in conflict with another person. You are tempted to focus on the wrong that the other person has done, and on your rights that were violated. But, if you are a follower of Christ, how are you called to approach conflict? (Phil. 2.3-11) explain.

Humility does not care about power and prestige and with always "being right." The other obvious point that Jesus is...

### **B. Humility means that recognize that you are helpless.**

"Unless you turn and become like little children...."

Jesus is telling his disciples that they must give up the rights they believe they have and step down to the level of a child. That means that you admit your weakness, your vulnerability and your inability to help yourself. Little children left to themselves cannot

feed themselves or provide for themselves. They need to be rescued. Unless you recognize that you are helpless, you will never cry out to Christ to rescue you.

The truth is, you are helpless to save yourself. You are helpless to save yourself from your sin. You are helpless to change your heart. You are helpless to change your nature. You are helpless to turn over a new leaf. You are helpless to address the root of sin that controls you. You need a Savior. You do not need a new program; you need the gospel. You do not need a new therapist; you need the only Savior. Most programs and therapists want to assure you that you really are a good person who just needs to find a way to come out and overcome your obstacles. Jesus tells you the truth. You are a sinner who will die under the judgment of God unless you repent and trust in Christ. But, you will not repent unless you recognize that you really are a sinner who is guilty before God and that Christ is your only hope.

Both of these concepts are offensive to many and here is why. The rules of a culture reflect the beliefs of the people. If I believe that me (and my type) are better than others then I do not want to treat others as my equal and neither do I want you to treat others as an equal. If you do, then you are exposing my belief as being wrong. So, when you challenge the rules of culture, you are exposing yourself to fire. But, that is exactly what Jesus did and that is what he calls us to do.

Jesus provides a summary statement in verse 4. “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” This should not surprise the disciples or us at all because this was how Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” How do you know if you are pursuing humility? Genuine humility will be seen in how you treat people who are vulnerable to you.

### **III. Humility is seen in protecting the most vulnerable around you. (18.5-6)**

How do you receive the vulnerable and defenseless? There is a new kid at school or church, how do you treat him or her? There is a new person at work? How do you treat him or her? There is a family member who is needy and everyone in the family is talking about it. Do you just talk or do you act?

Verses 5-6 serve as a bridge from the exhortation to humbling yourself to the warning of what happens if you don't. The stakes are as high as they come. “Those who receive one such child in my name, receives me.” This one statement by Christ helps to tie all of this together.

Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven? Jesus. What does Jesus do? He puts a child in front of them and says unless you become like a child you will never enter the kingdom. What was he doing? He was calling them to follow him. What did he do? He became not just as a child, but he became a child. He, God, humbled himself and became a fetus, a baby, an infant, a toddler, a child, a student, a young adult and now a fully grown man. Why did he become a child? He became everything that we are (human)

while being everything that we are not (deity) so that he could experience everything that we do but in a way that we could not (sinless). And because of his death in our place he can change everything that we are because of everything that he has done.

How does Jesus treat those who are vulnerable? He lays down his life for them. When you do the same, you are receiving him. When you do not, you are abusing those whom Jesus loves. When you attack and abuse those whom Jesus loves, you are not only on the wrong side of history; you are well on your way to the wrong place for eternity.

Recently a group of ISIS followers in Libya kidnapped 21 Egyptian Christians who had gone to Libya in search of work. These followers of Christ were executed and one of the ISIS members video-taped the beheading and posted it online in order to strike further fear into the hearts of others and cause greater grief for their families. But their families did not react that way. Instead, they thanked the ISIS member who taped and posted the video because they were able to see that the last thing that these men did was confess their faith in Christ before they died.

Reflection Question(s):

- 1) How can you demonstrate more concern for those who are under you than you do about getting the “respect” you think you are entitled to?
- 2) What are some of the “rights” that you can surrender for the sake of the gospel?
- 3) Who is a vulnerable person that you are tempted to overlook because they are “not that important”?
- 4) Are you in conflict with someone? What attitude do you need to adopt in order to address it? (huge issue in chapter 18)