5/14/24 Who Then is the Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven presented by The Ministry of YOU

This was a question posed to Jesus by His disciples at that time. “Who then is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” My suspicion is that the previous events that took place leading up to this question were the reason for this audacious question. What had just taken place before the momentous question was asked? Apparently, there were a couple of eye-opening events that had taken place. We can see, in Matthew 17:1-8, the first event. Six days after this, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. His appearance underwent a change in their presence and His Face shone clear and bright like the sun, and His clothing became as white as light. Behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, who kept talking with Him.

Then Peter began to speak and said to Jesus, Lord, it is good and delightful that we are here; if You approve, I will put up three booths here, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah. While He was still speaking behold, a shining cloud (composed of light) overshadowed them, and a Voice from the cloud said, this is my Son, My Beloved, with Whom I Am (and have always been) delighted. Listen to Him! When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were seized with alarm and struck with fear. But Jesus came and touched them and said, get up, and do not be afraid. When they raised their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus.

Next awe-inspiring event happens as they are coming down from the mountain top. A man approached the Lord and asked Him to help his son who had epilepsy. The man explained that he had originally brought him to His disciples, but they weren’t able to cure Him. Let’s take a look at Jesus’ response to the distressed father. AMPC Matthew 17:17-18; And Jesus answered, oh you unbelieving (warped, wayward, rebellious) and thoroughly perverse generation! How long Am I to remain with you? How long Am I to bear with you? Bring him here to Me. Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Last but not least, the event of paying the temple tax with money Peter retrieved from the mouth of a fish. AMPC Matthew 17:24-27; When they arrived at Capernaum, the collectors of the half shekel (the temple tax) went up to Peter and said, does not your Teacher pay the half shekel?

He answered, “Yes.” When he came home, Jesus spoke to him (about it) first, saying, what do you think, Simon? From whom do earthly rulers collect duties or tribute from? Their own sons or from others, not their own family? Peter said, from other people not their own family. Jesus said to him, then the sons are exempt. However, in order not to give offense and cause them to stumble (that is, to cause them to judge unfavorably and unjustly) go down to the sea and throw in a hook. Take the first fish that comes up, when you open its mouth, you will find there a shekel. Take it and give it to them to pay the temple tax for Me and for yourself. Peter did very well that day because Jesus identified the first fish as the one with the shekel in its mouth. So, apparently there were many other fish to follow the first fish. That’s good news for a fisherman.

What a day this had been for the disciples. Over and over again they had seen displayed right before their eyes the Glory of God. I believe this is what provoked the question, “Who then is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” However, I don’t think the answer Jesus gave them is the answer they wanted to hear. AMPC Matthew 18:1-4; At that time the disciples came up and asked Jesus, who then is (really) the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven? He called a little child to Himself and put him in the midst of them. He said, truly I say to you unless you repent (change, turnabout) and become like little children (trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving), you can never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever will humble himself therefore and become like this little child (trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving) is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The KJV uses the word converted instead of repent. These two words are synonymous, they basically mean the same thing. The word “converted” in this verse of Scripture is the Greek word strepho (stref’-o). It means to turn, turn around, to turn one’s self from one’s course of conduct, i.e. to change one’s mind. It was obvious that the disciples hadn’t changed their minds or course of conduct. Remember, the incident with the distressed father with epileptic son who brought his son to the disciples so they could heal him. They were unsuccessful. Jesus explained to them why they were unsuccessful.

AMPC Matthew 17:20; He said to them, because of the littleness of your faith (that is your lack of firmly relying trust). For truly I say to you, if you have faith (that is living) like a grain of mustard, you can say to this mountain, move from here to yonder place, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible. Jesus rebuked or corrected them because they had not yet been converted or had changed their minds about their course of conduct. In other words, they hadn’t believed and received God’s way of being and doing right, which is faith working by Love. The disciples’ thinking was still like the world’s thinking. They were still thinking according to the world system. There is another incident where the disciples were actually arguing about who was the greatest among them. The Voice Translation Luke 22:23-27; Which one of us is the most faithful, the most important? Jesus (interrupting); the authority figures of the outsiders play this game, flexing their muscles in competition for power over one another, masking their quest for domination behind words like “benefactor” or “public servant.” But you must not indulge in this charade. Instead, among you, the greatest must become like the youngest and the leader must become a true servant. Who is greater right here as we eat this meal, those of us who sit at the table, or those who serve us? Doesn’t everyone normally assume those who serve? But consider My Role among you. I have been with you as a servant.

The Lord Jesus, the Rabbi or Teacher was helping his disciples to become His disciplined followers. However, before this can happen, they must do as Jesus explained. They will have to choose to humble themselves and consider themselves like children even though they are adults. This requires a change of mind because most adults consider themselves to be adults and not little children anymore. Yet, Jesus said, this is exactly what we have to do. Jesus explains this concept to Nicodemus a Pharisee who holds a seat on the ruling council known as the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus came to Jesus in the cover of night to inquire about His teachings. Jesus gets right to the point. The Voice Translation John 3:3; I tell you the Truth; only someone who experiences birth for a second time can hope to see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus didn’t understand this statement. John 3:4; I am a grown man. How can someone be born again when he is old like me? Am I to crawl back into my mother’s womb for a second birth? That’s impossible! Nicodemus didn’t understand because he was only thinking from a human point of view. Jesus was speaking of spiritual Truths. So, Jesus explains. John 3:5-8; I tell you the Truth, if someone does not experience water and Spirit birth, there’s no chance he will make it into God’s Kingdom. Like from like. Whatever is born from flesh is flesh; whatever is born from Spirit is spirit. Don’t be shocked by My Words, but I tell you the Truth. Even you, an educated and respected man among your people, must be reborn by the Spirit to enter the Kingdom of God. The wind blows all around us as if it has a will of its own; we feel and hear it, but we do not understand where it comes from or where it will end up. Life in the Spirit is as if it were the wind of God.

The Lord Jesus made it very clear to Nicodemus that there were no exceptions, everyone must be born a second time into the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Peter apparently learned this from his time of mentoring with His Mentor Jesus because he wrote about it in his letters. Weymouth New Testament 1 Peter 2:2; Thirst, like newly born infants, for pure milk for the soul, that by it you may grow up to salvation. In addition, the author of Hebrews was also impressed by the Holy Spirit to discuss this matter of growing from milk to meat. AMPC Hebrews 5:13-14; For everyone who continues to feed on milk is obviously inexperienced and unskilled in the doctrine of righteousness (of conformity to the divine will in purpose, thought, and action), for he is a mere infant (not able to talk yet)! But solid food is for full grown men, for those whose senses and mental faculties are trained by practice to discriminate and distinguish between what is morally good and noble and what is evil and contrary either to divine or human law.

The writer of Hebrews so eloquently explains the difference between being an infant and growing from infancy to full-grown men, which is the full stature of Jesus Christ. Which is God’s Will for all of His children is to grow up and become just like the Firstborn. AMPC Romans 8:29; For those whom He foreknew (of whom He was aware and loved beforehand), He also destined from the beginning (foreordaining them) to be molded into the image of His Son (and share inwardly His Likeness), that He might become the Firstborn among many brethren. The Apostle Paul also reminds us of this spiritual Truth in his letter to the Ephesians. ESV Ephesians 4:13; Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Praise God we are all a part of a church whose mission is to bring the body of Christ from the milk of the Word to the Meat of the Word. We must keep in mind the admonishment of our Big Brother Jesus. “Whoever will humble himself therefore and become like this little child (trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving) is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.” We have to choose to be born a second time and enter the Kingdom of God like an infant. We have to choose to humble ourselves because becoming lowly as child when you are an adult isn’t easy but it’s necessary!