

Who is the Greatest in the Kingdom of God? May 18, 2014

It is a part of our human nature to be competitive. In family relationships, there is usually the question of “who is the favorite?” My children would check under the Christmas tree to be sure that each of them had the same amount of presents under there. They have had discussions over which one was my favorite. It is interesting because so many families have that same type of dialogue each vying for the special spot of being labeled “the top dog”. I was very much aware of this because as a middle child, I felt left out.

As I have read the New Testament, I have to admit that it really surprises me that the disciples were at time arguing over who was going to attain that highest position possible in the kingdom of God. They all had hopes for that position. James and John even had their mother make a request to Jesus that her sons would be given those positions of one sitting on the left side of Jesus and one on his right side when he set up his kingdom. (Matthew 20:21). Their coveted goal caused their mother to approach Jesus asking that her request be granted. Jesus didn't scold her or humiliate her for daring to ask for such a thing. He simply said, “They will drink of the cup that I drink of, but to sit one on the left side and the other on my right side is not mine to give. My Father has those positions all spoken for in his plan and He will give them to those who he had chosen.”

In Matthew 18:1, the followers of Jesus came to him and asked, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?” Jesus called a child to him and sat him down before his followers. He then spoke these words, “I tell you the truth, you must change and become like little children. Otherwise, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. The greatest person in the kingdom of heaven is the one who makes himself humble like the child. Whoever accepts a child in my name accepts me.

1 John 3:1 reads like this: “The Father has loved us so much that we are called children of God. We really are his children. Sin is expressed when man breaks God's law. Christ came to take away sins and there is no sin in Christ. Those who follow Christ do not continue living in sin. If you desire to be like Jesus, you must do what is right. The devil has been sinning from the beginning so anyone who continues to sin belongs to the devil. The Son of God came for the purpose of destroying the devil's work.

Last Sunday I had the opportunity to watch children as they worked together. There were children from the ages of 4-10 and we were making a cake. I asked the oldest boy to open cans of fruit and the little ones to spread the pie filling in the bottom of the cake pan. I couldn't help but take note of the sweet attitudes of the children. The little ones spread the filling around in the pan and it took quite a while as they played, but the older ones were patient with them until they were satisfied with their accomplishments. The older ones then proceeded with the next part of the tasks spreading the topping and nuts on the cake. One of them cut butter cubes and the other found the right spot to place it on the top of the mixture. There was no bickering or arguments on who was going to do what and the finished product was absolutely delightful.

That is the attitude that we should have with each other. We should be happy when one of our brothers or sisters are blessed with good things, rather than being envious. How many times do we wonder “Why doesn’t that happen for me just once?”

In Numbers chapter 13, God spoke to Moses and told him to send out spies to check out the Promised Land, the land of Canaan. One leader from each tribe was sent to spy out the land and to bring back a report whether they should proceed with claiming it or not. They brought back beautiful fruit from the land. They declared the land to be fertile and good. The fruit enticed them, but there were people who lived there who were strong and the land had walls and the people were strong. The Anakites and Jebusites and Amorites lived in the region. The Amalekites lived in the southern area; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites lived in the mountains and the Canaanites lived near the sea and along the Jordan River. Caleb, son of Jephunneh from the tribe of Issachar, spoke up and told the people to be quiet. “We should certainly go up and claim the land”, he said. “We can do it.” Caleb was a man of 40 years old. But the people who had gone with him said, “No we cannot go for the inhabitants are stronger than we are. We looked and felt like grasshoppers beside them.” The leaders continued to speak discouraging words and Caleb and Joshua, who had also explored the land tore their clothes saying, “The land we explored is very good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land and give us that fertile land. Don’t turn against the Lord! Don’t fear the people! We will chew them up for they have no protection, but the Lord is with us. So don’t be afraid of them.” The people listened to the negativity and refused to move forward. Thus God was angry with them and caused them to stay in the desert for forty years, until all of that generation had died except for Caleb and Joshua.

It is interesting to note that when Moses chose a successor, God told him to train Joshua for the job. If you read the text, you will not find Caleb speaking negative about the fact that Joshua was chosen rather than he. When it came time to claim the inheritance, Caleb remembered the words that Moses spoke about him and he reminded Joshua that God had promised him the mountain area of Hebron for his inheritance and for his children forever. Because he had faith and believed that God would ensure that victory over the enemies was accomplished God gave him that area.

Read these verses in Joshua 14:6-15. Caleb was now 85, but he was as strong as he had been 45 years earlier and just as determined to fight the inhabitants and claim the property. He wasn’t looking for an easy spot to retire in; he was willing to surge ahead. He had been faithful in believing that God was able to give him the land whether he was 40 years old or 85 years old. The victory was in Jehovah. Children have faith and God is pleased with one who steps out in faith and trusts in his Word. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13.