



TRUTH IN LOVE

Shedding Light on the Word of God

DREAMS OF GREATNESS

Matthew 5:19

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

We all have dreams of greatness. I remember as a kid on the playground, I wasn't that great at sports, but I would always dream of catching that pop fly, or making the game winning basket. Most young boys probably have had similar dreams. As we get into adulthood, we dream of landing that big account, writing that best-selling book, making that scientific breakthrough, or becoming a famous politician.

Having such dreams is not bad. Part of being made in the image of God is becoming who He has made us to be so that we can do our best in life and reflect His greatness. Nevertheless, most of us are striving for greatness that is only temporary—greatness that will not last.

ETERNAL GREATNESS COMES FROM THE HEART

In Matthew 5:19, Jesus introduces us to the idea that as His followers, we must strive for eternal greatness—greatness that will last beyond death. This is a key theme in the Sermon on the Mount, and surfaces throughout the entire message. Jesus wants His followers to know that there are great benefits, blessings, and rewards for those disciples who follow His instructions and heed His commands (e.g., 5:2-12; 6:1-6, 16-21).

In the context, Jesus has just finished countering the accusation that some have leveled against Him that He was doing away with the Law. To the contrary, Jesus replied, He was here to fulfill it (5:17). He then went on to quote the Pharisaical teaching that not one “jot” (or *yod*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet), would pass from the Law until all was fulfilled (5:18).¹ Of course, in this statement, Jesus is using a bit of humor against the Pharisees.² But this humor is not to show how wrong they were in being so meticulous about the Law. To the contrary, Jesus raises the bar on them and shows that they were not meticulous enough!

They taught that one *yod* would not pass from the Law. Jesus went further by saying that a *tittle* would not pass either. While they focused primarily on outward obedience to the Law, Jesus shows in the rest of His sermon that what really matters is the inward attitude of the heart. For example, He will explain that the thoughts and attitudes that lead to murder and adultery are just as bad as the actions themselves. The Pharisees were focusing on every *jot* of the Law; Jesus does them one better by focusing on the *tittle* as well. They were focusing on the outward actions; Jesus will emphasize the inner heart attitude and motives.

Nevertheless, eternal greatness is not just about motives. For maximum eternal impact, Jesus explains that we must not only live obediently, but also teach others to do the same.

HAND AND MOUTH DISEASE

A lot of Christians have hand and mouth disease. This is not when we say one thing and do another (though that happens frequently enough), but when we do something wrong, and then to cover it up, get other Christians to come sin with us. We come up with reasons for why our sin isn't sin, and give these reasons to others so that they can join us. In this way, the sin that our hands perform is spread through the false teaching of our mouth.

This is the *tittle* the Pharisees were overlooking, and Jesus confronts them on it frequently during His ministry (cf. Matt 5:33-37; 23:24; Mark 7:11). The Pharisees were masters at finding loopholes in the Law for their own deviant behavior, and explaining away such sin so that others followed them in it. Some of the areas they did this with were with giving your word to someone (Matt 5:33-37), pointing out “big” sins while ignoring the “small” (Matt 23:24), taking care of your family (Mark 7:11), and paying taxes (Matt 22:17-21). Interestingly, these same issues (and others like them) are often explained away today as well. People still feel the need to justify their own bad behavior by teaching others to do the same.

EJECT THE COACH

But don't miss what Jesus says next. He is not so much condemning the sin, as the *one who teaches others to follow in that sin*. He says that the one who breaks one of the least of these commandments, **and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

Is the sin wrong? Absolutely. But Jesus died for all sins—past, present, and future—and no sin is so great that it causes Him to reject us. But when we sin, God wants us to admit that we have sinned, and thank Him for the blood of Jesus which cleanses and purifies us (1 John 1:9-10). We must confess our sin. This is how you deal with sin. Confess it, and praise God for His grace and forgiveness.

But instead, we frequently deny that we have sinned. We come up with reasons and explanations for why we have not sinned, and then to make ourselves feel better, go out and explain to others why they are not sinning either when they do the same things we did. So instead of confessing our sin, we are coaching others in sin.

This coaching others in sin is what Jesus condemns in Matthew 5:19. And the consequences for doing so are dire. Jesus says that those who sin and teach others to do the same will be **least in the kingdom**. Note that He does *not* say that they will be removed from the kingdom, or will lose their salvation. To the contrary, they are very clearly *still in the kingdom*, but are called “least” in the kingdom. That is, they will not have the same privileges and rewards in heaven as other believers.³ We will see this truth crop up elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 6:19-21), and it is a major theme in the rest of Scripture. Jesus instructs us—even commands us—to seek after riches, rewards, privileges, and greatness in the kingdom.

So do you have dreams of greatness? Frequently, God planted those dreams within you to be pursued for His glory. And as we pursue His will for our lives on earth, He shares some of His glory with us so that in the kingdom, we will be great. “God hints at His purpose for you by planting dreams within your heart.”⁴ But it all begins with living our lives for Jesus Christ, and when we sin (as we all do), admitting that we have sinned, rather than coaching others to do the same thing.

SPEAKING OF WHICH...

Do you ever dream about what a church should be, or could be? Is your church looking for a pastor? Is your church thinking of planting a sister church? If you answered “yes” to any of those questions, call me at 972-659-9302 or e-mail me at jmyers@tillhecomes.org.

I am one year away from graduation, after which time I hope to return to the pastorate. The only question is where.

Do You Want to Help Plant a Church?

We are not at all opposed to taking a position in an established church. If God leads us in that direction, we will gladly serve in an established church. However, Wendy and I believe God may be directing us to plant a church. Such a prospect thrills and terrifies us at the same time. Church planting can be one of the most fulfilling and exciting things a pastor does, but on the other hand (especially for pastors who are trying to support families), planting a church is often financially and emotionally demanding. I am praying that if God wants us to plant a church, He allows us to find a location and put together a core group of 12-15 people within the next 3-5 months. Such a group will help me pray and plan and dream for what God might have for our church, and we need at least six months for such prayerful planning.

If you think you might be one of those 12-15 people, or if you know someone who might be, please contact me right away by phone (972-659-9302) or e-mail (jmyers@tillhecomes.org). I'm looking forward to hearing what you believe God want to do in your community.

¹ See my previous article on Matthew 5:18.

² See Ronald Youngblood, *The Humor of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 65. Youngblood sees Christ's humor as a way of proving the Pharisees wrong.

³ Some may raise an objection to this statement based on what Jesus says in 5:20. We will discuss this verse in the next issue. For those who object that sinners do not enter heaven, note what Jesus says. He explains that those who break the least of the commandments and teach others to do the same are still in the kingdom. Disobedience doesn't prove a person was never saved in the first place. It simply proves they are disobedient. See Michael Wilkins, *NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 230.

⁴ Ann Spangler and Jean Syswerda, *Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 31.



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Family Update

by Wendy

It's been a busy two months for all of us, as you can see by the fact that we missed the March and April newsletters. Jeremy has been swamped with work, school, and three weeks of being sick. For two weeks, he was so sick, he couldn't even talk. Then Taylor and Kahlea got sick, followed by me. Selah missed it this year! So that took up most of April.

March included lots of fun, including Taylor turning 5, Kahlea turning 1, and Wendy turning 30 (again!). We all had a wonderful visit from my mom. She read lots of stories, did crafts, played with the girls, and passed out many hugs and kisses. We were all blessed by her visit.

Recently, the girls have been spending lots of time outside, watering the flower garden, and frequently, each other as well. They also are into bugs this year (yes, girls like bugs too), and catch as many caterpillars and potato bugs as they can for their little bug habitats. They have easily gathered 100 caterpillars, and call them their little "pets." Every morning they feed and water them, and during the day, carry them wherever they go outside. It's quite cute.



Texas sure has some beautiful flowers...the trees in the background are nice too...

Even with all this fun, our favorite thing to do is go around and smell all the roses and flowers that we have growing in our yard. And after smelling the roses, they pick them and give them to each other, or to Kahlea and I. They love flowers and they love them even more when they get to help plant, water, and take care of them. Each day they run outside to see which ones are budding, and which ones they can pick. They get just as excited about dandelions as they do roses (through Daddy doesn't). As long as it's growing and pretty, it's a flower to them. It is wonderful to watch. Even Kahlea gets in on this now. She'll run after Taylor and Selah while they all pick flowers and grass to make a pretty centerpiece or to put into a pot for salad or pie for the squirrels.

This month, I hope you can take the time to stop and smell the flowers God has placed in your life.

P.S. For those of you who remember our wonderful butterfly visitor from last spring, you'll be happy to know we've

already had one for this year. It landed on Selah's head one day, and traveled down onto her coat where it proceeded to "drink" some water droplets there. We all go to watch this in amazement. Then it traveled to Taylor's hand, Kahlea's head and tummy, my leg, and so on, for over half an hour. We were all struck by the gorgeous creation peacefully flitting about allowing us to admire it.

All we have to say is God is good. And yes, the girls are already praying for another butterfly friend. We'll let you know how God continues to shower love and joy onto the girls through more answered prayers as they come to pass.



Daddy with Taylor and Selah

The girls are very creative outside. They've been unicorns, reindeer and bunnies. One of their favorites is to pretend they are C. J. and Stacy from Insight for Living's *Paws and Tales* (If you have kids under 7, these are great for them to listen to!).

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Kahlea loves to pick flowers and give them to Mommy