

# The Peerage of the Kingdom

by Horatius Bonar

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*Jesus teaches that humility and conversion are essential for entering the kingdom of heaven, and that greatness is achieved by becoming little and acknowledging one's unworthiness.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 18:1

**Topics:** "Humility", "Entrance into the Kingdom"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar addresses the disciples' question about greatness in the kingdom of heaven, emphasizing their misunderstanding of entrance into the kingdom. He highlights that true greatness comes from humility and recognizing one's unworthiness, as exemplified by a child. Bonar explains that the way to enter the kingdom is not through merit or personal worth, but through faith and acknowledgment of one's nothingness before God. He contrasts the disciples' pride and ambition with the humility required to truly belong to the kingdom. Ultimately, he teaches that the path to greatness is through becoming the least, following the example of Christ.

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## Transcript

"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."--Matthew 18:1-4.

It was for a kingdom that Israel was looking; a heavenly kingdom. In spite of many low views, they believed in "the kingdom of heaven"; "the kingdom of God"; and in "the kingdom of Messiah," as the same with these. Being persuaded of their Master's Messiahship, his disciples wanted to know from him something about his kingdom. They took for granted that it was theirs; that they were sure of entrance; and they wished him to tell them who was to have the highest place in it. They were too sure of getting in. Alas, how many now are not sure at all.

Let us mark (1) the question, (2) the answer. In that question we find something right and something wrong. Let us look at it; and then see how exactly the answer meets it.

I. The question. Who is the greatest in the kingdom? Besides the belief in a coming kingdom, there was an appreciation of its glories and honours. It was not wrong to wish for the kingdom; nor to desire a high place

in it. We ought to "press forward;" for if it is worth our while to get in at all, it is as much so to get a high place; for all that God gives is to be earnestly sought after by us; we cannot be too greedy of these. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." This was right; but the wrong thing was the spirit and the way in which the question was put.

(1.) It shewed ignorance. They had forgotten the words spoken to Nicodemus, "except a man be born again," &c. They were going too fast, and overlooking the question of entrance. They were deficient in their knowledge of the kingdom, and of the way of entrance, and of the principles on which honours were bestowed.

(2.) It shewed pride. It was a self-sufficient question; indicating high thoughts of themselves and of their own title to its privileges. "We are the people."

(3.) It shewed selfishness. Here was earthly ambition working its way into heavenly things; a spirit of selfish rivalry, each one wanting to get above his fellow,--to push up to the highest seat and room.

II. The answer. It goes to the very root of the matter; it deals first of all with the question which they were overlooking, viz., of entrance. Thus it rebukes, it warns, it instructs; answering not merely the one question put, but many others along with it. When man puts a question to God, he does not see the whole bearings of it. When God answers, he takes up all these, and does not answer a fool according to his folly, but lovingly condescends to take up the whole case from the beginning. The Lord here answers partly in a similitude and partly in words. He takes an infant, and holding it up, he asks, how is this babe to get in? They believed that babes belonged to the kingdom; He had told them that "of such was the kingdom of heaven." Well, how did they get in? Had they said or done any good? None. They get in as mere nothings; as those who have no good word or deed to recommend them. Our Lord's two cases of entrance are, the thief on the cross,--a man who had done nothing but evil all his days, and an infant who has done no good. These shew us the way of entrance. Hence the passage means not, except ye become humble, teachable, meek, gentle, &c., as infants (they are not so); but except ye turn round, completely change your mind (be converted), and humble yourselves (come down from your high thoughts), ye shall not get in at all. Not only, ye shall not have a high place,--an "abundant entrance," but no entrance at all.

The way, then, of becoming great is to become little,--of being the greatest, is to become the least. This was the Master's way; he took the lowest place, and he was exalted to the highest. He made himself of no reputation, therefore he gets the name above every name. Before honour is humility,--stooping to the consciousness of having deserved nothing. The Master went far beyond us here, for we truly deserved nothing, and therefore ought to take the lowest place; he deserved everything, yet lived and acted, as if he had deserved only sorrow, and pain, and shame, and the death of the cross.

Let us then learn,

(1.) The way of entrance. Go in as an infant, carried in by another,--without claim, merit, goodness; owing all to the free love of God; of Him who spared not his own Son. Faith acknowledges this nothingness, and goes in; unbelief refuses to do so, and is kept out. What keeps us in darkness or doubt, but the desire to have some goodness either in life or feeling to secure our entrance and recommend us to the King?

(2.) The principle of recompense. Not merit; not personal worth and greatness. The acknowledgment of unworthiness even to get in at all. Yet we must work for God,--suffer for God, deny ourselves for God,--and all these (even the cup of cold water) will be remembered and recompensed. Yet in that

recompense (even of these whose crown shall be the brightest) there will be the distinct consciousness of undeservedness all the while. "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee."

How simple! how blessed! Ah surely God's thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways.

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