

The Upside-Down Kingdom of Heaven

A Devotional on True Greatness and Servant Leadership

Devotional Family, Discipleship and the Christian Life Early March 2022

Mark 10:42-45

John 3:30

1 Peter 5:1-2

I liked the expression “the upside-down Kingdom of Heaven,” by Ann Voskamp. Read in isolation, it gives the impression of a chaotic Kingdom of Heaven, which obviously cannot be so, as creation itself testifies to an orderly Creator, Jesus Christ. It is clarified to mean “down is up and up is down, and those who want to ascend higher must descend lower.” Most people struggle to keep pace with the rapid changes that happen around us as citizens of the twenty-four-hour world order. We live in an era in which time management has become a field of study in itself, teaching people how to cope with many tasks to be achieved within the scarcest of resources — time — and this results in a mad rush to get to the top.

In the light of this, one wonders: how do we descend lower in order to ascend higher? If you do not believe that the present form of life is just a precursor to a glorious life with Jesus in the Kingdom of Heaven, and that this life is not the end of all things, read no further; keep running faster and faster towards your ever-shifting goal posts.

We read in Mark 10:42-45: “But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

James and John wanted the highest positions in Jesus’ Kingdom, but Jesus told them that true greatness comes in serving others. We know that the secular world measures greatness by high personal achievement. In Christ’s Kingdom, however, service is the way to get ahead. The desire to be at the top will hinder, not help; rather than seeking to have your own needs met, look for ways in which you can minister to the needs of others. The most critical attribute of a servant is humility. Humility calls for humbling oneself before others, and when you serve others in this manner, you are, in effect, serving Jesus Christ. The humility we exhibit, by the same token, is a humbling before Jesus Christ. The New International Version renders John 3:30 as “He must become greater; I must become less.” The King James Version

expresses this, perhaps, more explicitly still: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” The statement is in the present continuous tense. The decrease, or descent, must continue to happen — lower and lower — so that Jesus is exalted higher and higher.

In the context of the Church, this principle becomes still more prominent. People aspire to be “someone” within a local church. Peter, in 1 Peter 5:1-2, makes an appeal to such people: “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.” Peter brings out several characteristics of good leaders in the Church: they realise they are caring for God’s flock, not their own; they lead out of eagerness to serve, ready to humble themselves, not out of obligation; they are concerned for what they can give, not for what they can get, whether money, power, or authority; and they lead by example. These characteristics ought to be reflected upon, and used as the yardstick by which such leaders, and those who aspire to lead, measure themselves.

Both the young and the old can benefit from Peter’s instruction. Peter addressed young and old alike, calling them to be humble and to serve one another. In the service of the Lord there are no class biases — rich or poor, mighty or weak, abled or differently enabled, old or young. The principle applies to all alike. Amen.