

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM

The popular game show *Jeopardy* is presently having a "Greatest of All Time" tournament between the three biggest winners in its history. The winner of this tournament will be considered the greatest Jeopardy player of all time.

There is a lot of discussion in sports, politics, and other realms as to who should be considered the greatest quarterback, the greatest team, the greatest president, the greatest rock band, etc. The debates can become heated and lengthy.

The subject of greatness and who is considered the greatest is something that many are interested in. That included the disciples of Jesus:



At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will

by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. (Matt. 18:1-5)

Please note that Jesus did not say that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven would be the most talented, the richest, the smartest, or the most popular. He used a little child to illustrate that the character of the greatest person would be humility.

On another occasion, Jesus stated that "whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:26). Even after that we are told that "there was a rivalry among [the disciples], as to which of them should be considered the greatest." Jesus told them, "He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves" (Lk. 22:24, 26).

The greatest Jeopardy player will win with the most points, but the greatest in the kingdom of heaven will be the one humble enough to serve others. One will not become great by seeking earthly fame, but "he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23:11-12).

MWG

New Heavens, New Earth *Joe R. Price*

The basic meaning of the expression "heavens and the earth" is that of a dwelling place, a habitation. In Genesis 1:1 God created "the heavens and the earth" - the physical world - for mankind to inhabit (Gen. 1:26-28).

We later find a similar expression used with a spiritual connotation (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). Isaiah spoke of God creating "new heavens and a new earth" in which all men would come to worship before Him (Isa. 65:17; 66:23). He thus prophesied of the church - the habitation or dwelling place of God's people (cf. Isa. 2:1-4).

God dwells with His people in the church, and they with Him (2 Cor. 6:16-18). Christians are raised out of the death of sin to sit "in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:5-6).

We become citizens of a new kingdom when we are saved in Christ (Col. 1:13). Christians inhabit a new and spiritual realm, the church (Acts 2:47). Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in the church over which Christ reigns and into which we have been transferred (Col. 1:13; Rev. 5:9-10).

The kingdom of Christ, or church, is a dwelling place uniquely different from this earth. It is a spiritual kingdom, the house of God, where peace between God and man exists (Eph. 2:14-22). This world is not my home!

When Peter used the expression "new heavens and a new earth" in 2 Peter 3:13 he is looking forward to yet another dwelling place of God's people - the eternal kingdom, our heavenly home (2 Pet. 1:11). In visionary form, John saw this "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). Revelation 20:11 and 21:1 speak of the time when this material world is destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10). In its place will be "new heavens and new earth" where God's people will eternally dwell with Him.

In summary, we see the same expression, "heavens and earth" applied first to this material world (Gen. 1:1), then to spiritual kingdom which now exists, the church (Isa. 65:17; 66:22), and finally to the eternal kingdom, our heavenly inheritance (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). In each case it is applied to a habitation created by God for His creation. As His "new creation" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17), Christians presently inhabit the Messiah's kingdom. In the last, glorious day, Christ will deliver us, His kingdom, unto God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28). In that habitation of righteousness we shall dwell forever (Matt. 25:46). ☩