

Citizens and Strangers (Part 1) – The Kingdom Made and Lost

Matt Chandler – March 4, 2018

[Video]

Female: The kingdom of God is as multifaceted and mysterious as our Creator, a kingdom we only see now through a glass darkly. Though we can't picture it fully, God's kingdom is the story told in Scripture, from the garden to the city, and in the middle of the story God chose to reveal his kingdom in a new way.

The gospel is not only Jesus coming and dying to save us from our sins; it's also the story of God establishing his dwelling, dominion, and dynasty in the world. We live as both citizens and strangers, prisoners of hope in this shadow kingdom, all while knowing it's not our true home, that something better is coming, that God's perfect kingdom *is* coming.

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I promise the series isn't nearly as ominous as the music in the bumper videos. It's like, "Am I preaching angry today? I don't think I am." If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. Genesis, chapter 1. If you don't have a Bible, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you.

Now just kind of my heart for the next 12 weeks. Over the course of the last 15 years, I've preached through maybe 15 to 18 series, and some of those series have been these Ebenezer-like rocks in the ground that have kind of shaped or changed how we have looked at things, approached things, or behaved as a church body. I am hopeful that this is one of those series.

For the next 12 weeks, we're going to be in this series we've called *Citizens and Strangers*, living and reigning in the kingdom of God. I'm hopeful The Village Church will learn to use words like *we* and

us rather than *I* and *me*. I'm asking that God would show us collectively what it means to be the people of God in *this* place, in *this* time, for his glory and our good.

I'm eager to see him do those things among us. I think a more individualized Christianity here and in the West has taken from us the joy of what it means to belong to the kingdom of God. In Philippians 3:20, we're called *citizens of heaven*, and then later on in 1 Peter, those who belonged to the church were called *exiles and strangers*.

This word *exile*, in particular, could mean refugee. We could just blow through our Bibles and not pay attention to those two concepts that saturate the New Testament. Through first-century ears and eyes, they're hearing that language as kingdom language. Although they are under Roman rule, their ultimate allegiance is not to Rome but to the kingdom.

They are hearing that for all the comfort Roman rule has brought about... If you've studied history, you have Roman roads, you have Roman peace, you have things that exist in the world that had not existed before, and you have these men and women saying, "Our allegiance is not to Rome; it's to heaven, and this is not our home. We are exiles and strangers here. Our comfort, our hope has not been placed in Rome's rule; it has been placed in the King of heaven."

Now this is hard for us, and there are two reasons it's hard for us. First, all we have ever known is being a part of a democratic republic. We conquer tyrant kings; we don't serve one. So culturally, the idea of king and kingdom is foreign to us, because all we know, as Americans, is kings are bad. They're so bad we'll dump our tea in the harbor. We ain't having it. That is not our kind of government.

The second thing is kingdom language itself in the Bible can get somewhat confusing. Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is here, but it's also in the future." What do you do with that? If it's here, how can it be in the future? If it's in us, how can it also be a place? If it's about judgment, how can it be about salvation? There's this weird language around the kingdom, which requires us to dive in rather than just do a cursory reading.

So I thought maybe what would help us here at the beginning is just to define what we are going to mean when we talk about the kingdom of God. I'm going to use Steve Timmis' definition. Steve is the CEO of Acts 29. It's this global church-planting network. We're actually a big part of that network. Here's Steve's definition of the kingdom.

"The kingdom of God is where the Father's rule is exercised through the Son by the power of the Spirit so that it is willingly obeyed, gloriously displayed, and happily enjoyed among his people in the world." When we're talking about the kingdom of God, that's what we're talking about. You have the Godhead...God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. You have this picture of salvation, and that salvation is then creating, as we see, willing obedience to this King who is now gloriously displayed to the world around us as it's happily enjoyed by his people in the world.

When we're talking about the kingdom, that's what we're talking about. My hope today is to set the plotline for the kingdom so we might understand it more fully and, in the weeks to come, grow in the boldness that being citizens of heaven should bring about in the life of the believer. The plotline for the kingdom is found in Genesis 1-3, so I want us to look at some of this together. I won't read all three of these chapters, but I *am* going to read quite a bit today. Genesis 1, starting in verse 28.

"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.

And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."

If you know your Bible, this is the end of creation. On the seventh day, God rests. You have the Sabbath introduced on the seventh day. So now we have the end of creation. We have this refrain that it is good, and what we see in Eden is a picture of the kingdom of God. What you see in Eden is order without chaos, life without death, the presence of God made available, not through a veil, not seen through a foggy lens, not some reflection, but the presence of God that walks in the cool of the garden with his people.

You see in Eden the kingdom. In fact, I don't know if you noticed this, but not only is God's presence full and ripe in the kingdom but there's no death there. Did you notice while we read what was not

on the menu? Meat. Why? Because in order to eat meat something had to die, and there *was* no death. Now don't freak out, because you get your rib eye in Genesis 11.

So you vegans who were about to go, "I knew it! I told you guys," and to judge us who imbibe deeply in God's great, merciful gift of steak and chicken and the like... (Oh, *that's* going to get you worshipping, right? Nothing else yet, but you start talking about rib eyes, and now all of a sudden people are speaking in tongues.)

So you have now this world, this kingdom... There's no chaos. There's no death. It's said of the man and woman that they are naked and unashamed. We've talked about this a lot. He's talking about not just their physical being but actually their spiritual makeup. There is nothing to hide. There is no shame. They are naked, fully seen, and they feel no shame, no need to hide, no need to pretend they're something else. Can you imagine what that must be like?

How much of your energy is spent hiding shame? Yet that's not the kingdom. The kingdom is there *is* no shame. No fig leaves. No pants. Just nothing to hide. Fully known, fully loved in the presence of God. This is the kingdom: chaos driven out through order, the presence of God unimpeded. No death, only life. No shame, only peace. The kingdom of God. Then there are these *citizens* in this kingdom. Look at the two verses right before this, starting in verse 26.

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Now you have the kingdom, and now we have citizens of the kingdom, the man and the woman, and they are given a purpose. God did not just create them for eye candy. They have a role in the kingdom, and their role in the kingdom is called the *cultural mandate*.

What God just asked of Adam and Eve is, "Hey, do you see the order of Eden? Go out into the chaos of the world and bring the kingdom to the chaos of the world. Bring about order into chaos. Bring light into darkness. Fill the earth. Subdue it. I've given you dominion over everything." So you have the kingdom, you have the citizens of the kingdom, and then you have the *law* of the kingdom. Notice I didn't say the *laws*; I said the *law*. There's a real simplicity to the kingdom of God.

My oldest daughter turned 15. You know what that means. That means we have a permit, and that means she is driving quite a bit. Now here's what I'll say about Audrey. She's a really good driver. She's a better driver than a lot of adults I've been in the car with. She's careful. I think that's probably because she's a little nervous. But you forget about just how many laws exist just driving. Let's forget about tax law and how that'll just give you a seizure if you're not careful, how different that is every year. You have to relearn every year, reread every year.

But just driving. Most of us in this room so intuitively drive we forget all of the laws. I don't know if you know this, but you actually have to use your signal. Did you know that? It's not just, "I feel like it." Legally, you must show the vehicles around you, "Hey, I'm going to get in the left lane. Hey, the reason I'm slowing down here is I'm going to make a right." You can be ticketed for what they call *failure to signal*. Did you know that's a law?

So sitting in the car with Audrey, I'm constantly going, "Hey, you've got to turn your blinker on. Turn your blinker on. Yeah, that's a green light, yet to make a left on this green light means you still must yield to..." This is a hard one for her. Not for us, because we've been driving. "Listen, I know that's a green light, but the ones that are coming 45 miles an hour *this* way, they have the... Listen. I'm on the right side of the car. Do not make this left."

There are hundreds of laws, and it's just driving the car. I didn't even mention speed limit, which is the easiest and yet the hardest. There are all of these laws we have to obey, but in the kingdom there's only one law. Let's look at it. Genesis 2, starting in verse 15.

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"

Think about the simplicity of the kingdom. You have the presence of God made available. You have purpose. You have dominion. You're viceroys, image bearers in the kingdom, given the task of the kingdom by the King of the kingdom, and there's one law. *One*. "Don't eat this." Why "Don't eat this"?

Because here's the law of the kingdom: "What you need is me. What you've been built for, designed for, oriented around is my presence. Don't operate like you don't need me. Don't rebel against the thing your soul most desperately needs. You don't need to know right from wrong; you need to know *me*, and you need to be in my presence." That's the law of the kingdom.

So let's look at the beauty of what it means to be in the kingdom: the presence of God, the order of God, the peace of God, the purpose of God, the power of God, with no death, order rather than chaos, peace rather than shame. Yet here's the conversation we must have.

I got sick earlier this week. I thought I'd made it through. The flu kind of blew through our house, and I thought, "Ah yeah, super immune system." Wrong. Monday my hands started aching, and I just thought, "I'll push through that," like most moron men. Then it wasn't but a few hours later that I was running a fever and asking for the sweet embrace of death.

When I finally was able to open up my computer and start to check on some things, I can't tell you how many email threads there were among our elders and staff about who was going to which hospital to visit who and that *this* tragedy had occurred and *this* heartbreaking thing had happened and *this* thing was on fire.

I could see our ministers and pastors and elders spread across the Metroplex, ministering to those who are not in the midst of peace but in the midst of chaos; not experiencing harmony but experiencing loss; not tasting the sweetness of life but feeling the sting of death. So if this is the kingdom and God is the Sovereign King, what do we make of our sorrows? Well, let's look at Genesis 3.

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden"?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

God didn't say that. That's not what God said. Just beware of vain religiosity that adds to the Word of God where God has not made himself clear. You just need to be aware of that.

"But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God..." Easily the most heartbreaking sentence in all of the Bible. **"...among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?'"**

There's something happening about the grace, character, and nature of God I don't want you to miss out on. In this pronouncement of judgment, in this rebellion against the King and the kingdom, God is extending grace yet again. Do you see him wooing Adam out of shame and into confession? God is not asking these questions because he doesn't know the answer. When God is like, "Hey, have you eaten of the fruit?" it's not like God doesn't know.

It's not like God was in the kitchen and wasn't paying attention, and then all of a sudden he looked back and was like, "What in the world is *this*?" God knew. He's wooing Adam even in Adam's rebellion. Even in the very beginning, what did God say? "If you eat that, you're going to die." They ate that, they *didn't* die, and God shows up, not with a hammer but coaxing him out of his shame. "What have you done? Did you do what I told you not to do?" Let's keep going.

Verse 10: **"And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?'"** Here comes your relational strife. Verse 12: **"The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.' Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"**

Self-righteous people will never own the destruction of their sinful patterns. They will always have somebody to blame. They will always have a finger to point at the other and why the other is at fault and why their rebellion is actually on somebody else. It's funny. This story plays out even to this day. Verse 14:

"The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.'" That's our first messianic prophecy.

"To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.' And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you..." Do you see chaos invading harmony in these pronouncements?

"...in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." There's death. So now we have chaos and death where there was harmony and life.

Verse 20: **"The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them."** Do you see the kindness of God even in the midst of this? They're wearing fig leaves, and he gives them these little leather outfits of rebellion.

"Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—' therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life."

Genesis 3 is about the kingdom lost. There is much lost in Genesis 3, nothing as significant as the loss of God's presence. The one thing we most desperately need to thrive as created beings is the presence of the Creator and King. Without it we are left discombobulated, we are left confused, we are left like blind men and women, reaching out to try to heal a disease we neither understand nor can fix on our own.

You see all sorts of things here, consequences for the citizens. You see creation reordered. We just saw it. We saw there was peace and life and there was no chaos, and now you have thorns and thistles instead of vegetation that's meant to feed us. You have death. Where did that leather gear come from? You have Adam and Eve now being... "You will die. You will go back to being dust."

You have all of creation twisted, so that Paul would write later on in the book of Romans that all creation groans, longing to be redeemed and reconciled back into the kingdom, back into what was meant to be. This is what you feel. That longing, that angst in your soul? This is what it remembers. There's something in us that can remember this.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says God has put eternity into our hearts. You cannot fill eternity with what is temporal. Have you ever noticed the line keeps moving on you? We'll talk more about that in a little bit. So this is the basic plotline of the kingdom. How are we to understand that? Let me maybe flesh this out a little bit.

The first sermon in a series is always a bit nerve-racking, because I have 12 weeks of outlines, and I need to preach *this* sermon and not the sermon next weekend or the weekend after that. Let me just set us up moving forward. I think one of the ways I can help us understand the story of, the plotline of the kingdom is three words you're going to hear over and over and over again. Here are your three words (you'll see my inner Baptist coming out): *dwelling*, *dominion*, and *dynasty*. Let's talk about that.

Let's talk about *dwelling*. When we talk about dwelling, we're talking about God's presence with his people. The whole of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, could be summed up in three words: *God with us*. That's the story of the Bible. Throughout the Scriptures, if you know your Bible, if you've been at church, just think how often heaven invades earth with the presence of God.

Eden is about God with us. The children of God being pulled out of exodus, the establishment of the tabernacle is about the presence of God. Solomon building the temple is God with us. Christ coming,

putting on flesh, and dwelling among us in the incarnation is about God with us, the presence of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is about God with us, the presence of God among his people. The New Jerusalem we read about in the book of Revelation is about the presence of God among his people.

The dwelling of God among his people is what the hearts and souls of all humankind are angsty and longing for and can't seem to figure out, and yet it is heaven that keeps coming down to earth; it is not earth that has ever figured out a way to get to heaven. We have not built towers to glory; glory has come down. Do you get this? This is about what you most desperately need. Because of the fall, because of the kingdom lost, we are disoriented and broken and trying to fill what we were created for with cheap, trinkety garbage that will not satisfy us.

Again, do you notice that the line keeps moving on you? Like, "I can't wait till I can drive. If I could just drive..." Do you remember that? I know, because it's going on in my house right now. "If I could just drive, I'm going to be a whole person." Then guess what happens when you start to drive? You can't wait to graduate. Guess what when you graduate? You can't wait to go to college. Guess what when you get to college? You can't wait to get out of college.

Think about it. Most of us are a little bit older. We have 420 high schoolers and middle schoolers away at Spin Weekend. In fact, we got a great report last night. Several young men and women gave their lives to Jesus, a ton of repentance, just really good things at Spin. Praise God. Listen, though. I'm looking around. Most of us in this room... You have to be old enough now to feel that the dadgum line keeps moving.

"If I could just get a house. Oh gosh, this house isn't big enough. We need a playroom." You get a playroom. "Oh gosh, the playroom is not enough. We need a bigger yard. The yard is not big enough. We need a..." It just keeps moving. "I don't want an entry-level position; I want *this* position." I get that position. "I don't want *that* position; I want..."

It keeps moving, because what you most desperately need is not all that. You need dwelling. You need presence. This is what your soul was designed for. It's why money, sex, stuff, and power only satisfy you for a moment until you get numb with the amount you have and all of a sudden need more. That's what's going on in you. The kingdom lost. The good news is heaven just keeps breaking in.

Not only are we to think of the kingdom through the lens of dwelling but also *dominion*. When we talk about dominion, we're talking about the purpose by which God has saved you by his grace through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. The cultural mandate is given to Adam and Eve, and what are they told to do? Go out of Eden and bring order to chaos.

Then Jesus says to his church, "Go make disciples, Christ followers, agents of light and reconciliation, of all nations." Look at me. You have not been saved by grace through faith to sit around and marvel at being saved by grace through faith. You have been given a task on high, as citizens of heaven, to be ambassadors of heaven wherever you are.

I need you to hear me say this. We don't need more programs at The Village Church; we need the people of The Village Church to understand they're citizens and ambassadors of heaven. *You* are the program. *You are*. People who are far from God don't want to sit in a class. They need *you* in their lives...loving, crying, weeping, enjoying, inviting them in, sitting awkwardly through a message like this and then awkwardly explaining at lunch why I yell like this.

To enter into their habits and hobbies and love them well, not because they're a project but because you're a citizen of heaven who has been dwelling in the presence of God and you are emboldened by that presence to live out the kingdom. Work is about the kingdom. Marriage is about the kingdom. Children are about the kingdom. Money is about the kingdom. No wonder we're so disoriented.

My wife makes me happy. I love that woman. Today is her 38th birthday, and she's going to lead worship for us all day long into elder-led prayer tonight. She loves to do that more than anything else on the earth. She is a dear friend, but more than anything she is a good kingdom partner for me. I love all the romantic love I share with my spouse, yet what holds us together as a man or a woman isn't "In this specific season you're really making me happy" but "God has given you to me and me to you as partners for kingdom labor."

We see our house that way. We see our money that way. We see our marriage that way. We're trying to raise up little kingdom kids. Everything is through this lens. So when that's not what we do but that's what the church does, we're back to *I* and *me* rather than *we* and *us*. Now a church our size has to have some structure, and we're working on that, but you have to own the kingdom as citizens of the kingdom given the task of the kingdom to bring order into chaos.

Is that not every testimony? All 30-something testimonies we heard last week were order came into chaos, light came into darkness. And how did it come? Through a friend, through a family member, through joy, through tragedy. The kingdom breaking through, dwelling, dominion. By the way, because of kingdom lost, you will see people try to plug other things into this dominion piece. They will mistakenly think the point of marriage is their own personal happiness. That's a really cute, bad idea.

You put two sinners in the house, and there's going to be a lot of joy, but there are going to be some valleys. Amen? (Don't say it too loud, married people, especially if you're by your spouse. Just internally "Amen" me.) There are going to be seasons that are a little bit more dry. You're leaning into the covenant. You have this new space where you don't quite understand each other or what's going on with that, but you know you've been given to one another by God.

Men and women try to find purpose in work that's outside of the kingdom. I'm just going to ask...what purpose could you possibly find at work outside of the kingdom? You know you're going to retire, they're going to replace you, and nobody is talking about you in 20 years. I know in your mind you've worked so hard they're going to name the building after you. They're not. They will plug and play with a younger, cheaper version of you, and they will move on.

What a shame to give your life's purpose to work or to kids. Do you want me to keep going? All of this must be seen through the kingdom. I'm not trying to be Debbie Downer here. I'm trying to orient you around what ultimately matters most and, by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, save you from a life of pathetic boredom and rather release you into the dominion of God's purpose for your life.

Lastly, we have *dynasty*. I love *dynasty*. When we're talking about *dynasty*, we're talking about us as a people. Here's what we mean when we're talking about *dynasty*. You and I, as citizens of heaven, according to the Bible, will reign and rule alongside King Jesus forever. If you think back until about 300 years ago... In fact, how many of you watch the series on Netflix called *The Crown*? Any men watch that? I saw a lot of ladies and a couple of dudes throwing up some deuces like that.

There's this poignant moment in *The Crown*, the second season, where the queen is sitting down with Billy Graham. Billy Graham is leading the revival over there, so they're having this conversation, and the queen is talking about how good it felt to just sit there and not be the head of

the church. As the royal queen, the only person between her and God was no one. There was her, close to God, and then the commoners.

Well, in the kingdom of God, the commoners are royalty. That's our dynasty. Twenty thousand centuries from now, when all the material gatherings of legacy to lead to children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren... I think my legacy is probably going to make it right up until I die. When all of that is evaporated and doesn't matter anymore, we'll be ruling and reigning alongside King Jesus forever. We are a part of *the* monarch that will never change, will never be overthrown, the King of glory.

This is how we're to think about the kingdom: the presence of God, the task of God, and the dynasty we've been invited into. This is what it means to belong to the kingdom of God. We're going to be unpacking this over the next 11 weeks. Now if all of this is true, then how should we leave this room? What does this mean for leaving this room today in light of these things? Well, let's go back to Timmis' definition, and I want to highlight a couple of things in this.

Here's the definition of the kingdom we used early on. (We might use this definition again. I like the three *D*'s a little bit better, but we'll probably throw this out again.) "The kingdom of God is where the Father's rule is exercised through the Son by the power of the Spirit..." There's your salvation from the triune God of the universe, but what's going on? By the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of us through the Son we are now able to willingly obey and gloriously display and happily enjoy the rule of our King among ourselves in the world.

So what does this mean for how we are to leave this room? Well, let's chat, because I want to cultivate, by the grace of God, an "us-ness" a "we-ness" among us as citizens of heaven. When it comes to willing obedience... We've taught this a lot. Let me throw away a sentence I hope is not a throwaway. *Every do and don't in the Scripture is about your joy.* God is not some tyrannical monster. All of this "Do this, don't do this" is about life and joy. He never robs you from anything. He always leads you into what you most desperately need, whether you understand that or not.

So when the Scriptures say, "This is the way to live," it's not like God is a cranky, legalistic moralist. No, he's saying, "This way to life. This way to depth. This way to meaning. This way to joy." So what does it mean to willfully obey God? Well, we can just confess in this room that sometimes that's easier than others. Sometimes willing obedience is really, really easy, and sometimes willing obedience is very difficult.

We know, according to Steve's definition (which I thought he wrought from the Word of God very well), this involves the Spirit's power indwelling inside of us. That dwelling, that presence is a necessary good to embolden willful obedience, yet what we read in the Scriptures is that one of the primary tools by which God encourages, builds up, and empowers willful obedience is the other citizens of heaven themselves. It is the us-ness, the we-ness of our faith that emboldens and empowers, by the Spirit, willful obedience.

Think about this. Last week, I sat through all four of our services and saw over 30 people testify to the goodness of God. By hearing the testimonies of the saints, I am built up and encouraged toward willful obedience. When I am doing life with other Christians, when I am embedded with the citizens of heaven, they're able to boldly speak encouragement into me. This doesn't happen if I just attend church twice a month.

Listen. This isn't a membership drive, because I can promise you I'd preach like this if there were seven of you in here. I don't preach to seats. That's not my deal. The we-ness, the us-ness of the kingdom brings about the encouragement and, at times, the kind, loving rebuke of a brother or sister. It is not a cruel thing to lovingly rebuke. It is one of the most kind things you could do to just go, "Brother, sister, I love you. This seems out of step with what the Word of God has revealed. I'm not trying to sit in judgment on you. I'm trying to earnestly implore you to consider the better way."

I had a meeting two weeks ago with a couple of men in our church, and one of those men leads a nonprofit ministry that takes men on hikes through the Rocky Mountains in the summertime, and then at night, either around the fire or non-fire, depending on burn bans, they kind of throw out these questions for men to consider and talk about.

One of the men in the group was telling this story that there was this 60-something-year-old man, and he begins to share this moment from when he was in his 20s, and he just starts sobbing. I mean, a 60-something-year-old man just breaking around the campfire. Tears and snot, sharing this really hurtful, really hard moment of his life. Then at the end, when he was able to pull himself back together, he said, "I have never told anyone that in my life."

It had been this crushing, weighty, shameful secret that had been eating away at his guts for 40 years. Then, as he was heading back to the tent, the man I was meeting with said, "Hey, man, thank you so much for being so transparent with us." Because that's such a foreign concept around men,

this older man took offense to it, like he was being jacked with. He was like, "Really? Are you being serious right now?" My friend was like, "No, I'm being totally serious. I know how difficult that was. Thank you for trusting us."

The church needs to be a place that cultivates environments where nobody gets to say in their 60s, "I've never told that to anyone"; that we own our past in light of the finished work of Jesus Christ, and we belong to one another in a way that shows that we are citizens of the kingdom. It's not *me* and *I*; it's *us*. I need you, you need me, and without that, the way the Spirit encourages, emboldens, and empowers, willful obedience begins to flounder.

On top of that... I love this. I don't like the word *happily*, but Timmis is English. I don't think they did either, but this is the word in the definition. I like *joy*. *Joy* feels stronger. *Happy* feels fragile. But he says *happily enjoyed*. This goes back to the citizens of heaven cultivating an environment where we "one another" one another, where we encourage, love, and serve one another so that the joy or happiness of the rule and reign of our King is gloriously displayed among his people in the world.

Here's my encouragement. Coming to church and listening to sermons and songs... There is something that happens in the gathering, which is why the Bible is so serious about the gathering, saying, "Don't neglect it." You'd better get there, especially when you don't feel like being there. Are you feeling depressed and don't want to be around anyone? Take yourself to church. Are you feeling anxious and broken and far from God? Get to church.

There's something serious about the gathering, and yet citizens of heaven don't just operate *here*; we operate *with* one another *outside* of here, always, so that we might marvelously display the wisdom and beauty of our King. I want to just end with this. I love that it says *in the world*. Again, I want to press on this. The atoning work of Jesus Christ accomplished more than just your salvation.

Now I'm full-on. I'm Reformed in my soteriology. I'm all in on this, but I'm telling you, if your extent, your vision of the Christian life is "I've been forgiven of my sins; let's sing a little," you're off what God has for you in the kingdom. No, no, no. We bring order to chaos, light to darkness. Where? Wherever we are, with one another. You are the program.

Let me quote my friend Scott Sauls as I close this out. This is from a blog Scott wrote. I love Scott Sauls. If you don't have any of his books, go grab them. Here's basically what he said. This is just dreaming. "What if the church became the answer to loneliness, the life-giving alternative to social

media-induced isolation and depression, soul-stealing pornography habits, body-exploiting hookups, non-committal cohabitation, and lonesome bar stools?"

What if the kingdom of heaven was made visible through the citizens of heaven in their neighborhoods, in their workplaces, as we did life seriously with one another, ferociously committed to one another, bringing order to chaos, light to darkness? I'm trying to help us. I want you to know the Bible. I want you to deeply know the Bible. That's why we have classes. That's why we have the Institute.

I want you to know what it's like to be a part of the citizenship of heaven, in communal life with one another. That's why our groups here at The Village are not focused on in-depth Bible study; they're focused on "one anothering" one another, encouraging one another, testifying of God's goodness and grace, holding one another accountable, and spurring one another on to love and good deeds.

If we're going to be citizens of heaven, living out the kingdom of God in the here and now, it'll require a commitment to one another and an understanding of the purpose and task God has given us as his people. Or we could just keep doing church. I've said this for 15 years. What a lame hobby. Get a boat, man. That's what *I'd* be doing. Seriously. I don't want to just hear a lecture on Sunday morning and sing. That's weird. Give me a boat or a rifle and a deer stand or something like that. Yet we've been called into so much more. We'll talk about this for the next 11 weeks. Let's pray.

Father, bless your name. We thank you for the invitation to be citizens of the kingdom. Thank you that we are citizens of heaven and we are supposed to be strangers and aliens in this space. Forgive us where our comfort levels are more *here* than they are with you. Embolden us, encourage us, build us up in your love.

We thank you that you have not saved us for a life of moralistic therapy but, instead, you have filled us with your Spirit, given us a purpose, and we seek in our marriages, in our workplaces, with our children, with our money, with our hobbies, with our free time, with everything we are to step into the dominion, the task of the kingdom. Eradicate boredom from our hearts. It's for your beautiful name, amen.