

## Citizens and Strangers (Part 3) – The Way of Jesus

Matt Chandler – March 18, 2018

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[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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Good morning. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in Matthew, chapter 13. I have been a Christian now for 23 or 24 years, and upon my conversion it was wildly popular at that point in Christian history for Christians to be wearing one of two different bracelets or maybe both if you really, really loved the Lord.

The first bracelet had a series of beads, and it was meant to help you share the gospel with people. So people were like, "Hey, what's up with your bracelet?" and you were like, "This black bead here? It stands for your sin, and it's what separated you from the Lord, but the good news is... See this next bead? It's red and it's for the blood of Jesus. Look at the next bead. Now it's white because your sins have been changed from black to white, and now you are clean before God."

Because we were Baptists, we had the blue bead. Not everybody had the blue bead. The Church of Christ kids and the Baptists did. We had the blue bead for baptism. Then the last bead was a gold

bead that was for the streets of gold in heaven. It seems kitschy in 2018, but, man, it was something. I like our old kitschy way of doing things better than our more modern way of *not* doing things. It was this unique little way to share the gospel.

If you didn't have on *that* bracelet, maybe you had one that simply said, "WWJD?" which stood for "What Would Jesus Do?" What *would* he do? How easy is *that* question to answer? Like, will he spit in mud and wipe it on somebody's eyes to heal them from blindness? Will he flip over a table at church and kick everybody out? Will he curse a fig tree and make it shrivel? I mean, that's not an easy question, but the heart of it is, "Hey, we want to be people who look like Jesus, who walk like Jesus, who consider Jesus in all we do, so WWJD?"

This is week three of our series *Citizens and Strangers* on the kingdom of God. I don't have time to go back over all we've covered, but what I do want to point out is that what we want to look at today is what Jesus thought of the kingdom of God. Did Jesus come preaching something different or did Jesus come not only fulfilling but expanding on the people of God's view of and understanding of the kingdom?

So far, we've looked at *the kingdom born* and *the kingdom fallen*. That was week one. I thought JT did a masterful job last week of tying together the covenants and how that is all a part of the kingdom through the one sentence in Matthew's genealogy: "Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham, the son of David." In fact, one of my hopes in this series is for you to see and understand all the more the beauty of the unity of the Bible.

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Noah and Moses and Elijah and Elisha and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel... Those are not encapsulated stories unto themselves but actually are chapters in a larger story. It's by seeing that larger story we become emboldened to be the kind of people God has called us to be. So I want us to look at and marvel at Jesus and the way of Jesus concerning the kingdom in our time together.

If you're still a little bit confused about what we're talking about when we're talking about the kingdom, here's what we're talking about. Three *D*'s. The first thing we're talking about is *dwelling*. What we mean when we talk about dwelling is that you and I have been designed to be in the presence of God. In fact, the entire Bible can be summed up in three words: *God with us*. When you look at Eden in Genesis 1 and 2 you have God with us.

When you see the people of God led out of slavery in the exodus and the tabernacle set up you have the presence of God among his people. In the coming of Jesus Christ, the incarnation, it is said that Jesus came and dwelt, or tabernacled, with humankind. God's presence with us. When we see the incoming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, you have the indwelling power of God with his people. When we look at the end of the Bible in Revelation, new heavens and new earth, and God is with his people.

The kingdom of God is about the presence of God among the people of God. That's what we're talking about when we're talking about the kingdom. We're also then talking about *dominion*. Here's what I mean by *dominion*: you have not been saved by grace through faith for navel-gazing morality. Listen to me. *You have not been saved by grace through faith for navel-gazing morality.*

You have, like Adam and Eve in the garden and like the disciples at the mount of ascension, been given the task of the kingdom. Adam and Eve are told, "Take the order of Eden, take the light of Eden and bring order and light to chaos and darkness." Then Jesus, at his ascension, says to the disciples, "Go into all the nations and make disciples. Step into chaos and bring order. Step into darkness and bring light."

It's no wonder to me that so many Christians are bored with their faith. We've turned our faith into navel-gazing moral betterment rather than the mission of God to restrain evil, to push it back, and to establish light in darkness. No wonder we're bored. How boring is that? "I don't want to do bad. I don't want to do bad." I don't want to give my life to not doing bad. I want to give my life over to the purposes of God, the kingdom of God.

Then lastly, *dynasty*. The apostle Paul is one of the most frustrating humans ever if you're trying to get him to stop talking about Jesus. Like, "Hey, shut up about this Jesus guy or we'll throw you in prison."

"Great. I'll convert your guards."

"Okay. We'll torture you."

"Well, I don't really consider these light and momentary afflictions as worthy to compare to future glory."

"Okay. Well, then we'll kill you."

"To die is gain."

"All right. We'll leave you alone."

"To live is Christ."

I mean, you just couldn't do anything to him. That little line in the midst of horrific suffering, a kind of suffering that is foreign to most of us... He literally says, "These light and momentary afflictions are not worthy to be compared to future glory." So how do we make sense of that? Well, if you and I believe the Bible and we are a royal priesthood, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, then our dynasty is one of a royal lineage that has no end, which means we see the trinkets, toys, and temptations of 2018 through the lens of that dynasty.

This is why Paul said he counted everything as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ. He called it "rubbish." All of the earthly accolades I could gather, all of the religious check marks I get...it's all rubbish next to the dynasty I'm in in Jesus Christ. So we see the temptations, trinkets, and toys of this modern age, through the lenses of dynasty, and we walk in the royal line as ministers of reconciliation, viceroys of the kingdom, dwelling in the presence of God, exercising light and order into chaos and darkness.

This is what life is about at every level. This is what your job is about. This is what your family is about. It's what money is about. It's what vacation is about. It's what everything is about: the kingdom. Now that we fully understand the kingdom (that was a joke), let's answer the question...*WWJD?* In Mark, chapter 1, starting in verse 14, here's what the Bible says.

**"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled...'"** JT covered that last week. **"...and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."** So Jesus shows up, and what is his message? His message is, "The kingdom of God is at hand." What's the good news of God? That the time is fulfilled. The kingdom is breaking through.

Now if you think back to the brokenness that accompanied the fall, Jesus showing up is an invasion of what can only be called *enemy-occupied territory*. When Jesus shows up, he starts reorienting his

people's minds and hearts to the hope of what would come at the kingdom. Then he began to live in a kind of power that showed the kingdom of God was at hand.

Here's my outline. I want to show you the *reorientation of hope*, the *power of the in-breaking of the kingdom*, and then I want to lay before you the *invitation to be a part of it*. I wish I could do some alliteration there, but it just didn't work out. Let's look at Matthew 13. We really could cover this entire chapter, but until our services can be two hours long I have to pick and choose. Matthew 13, picking it up in verse 24:

**"He put another parable before them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven...'"** Which is synonymous with *kingdom of God*. **"...may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?'"**

**He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to [the master], 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But [the master] said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"**

**He put another parable before them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.' He told them another parable. 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.'"**

It's important for us to note that this teaching on the kingdom from Jesus would have been extremely disorienting to first-century Jewish ears. They have a view of the kingdom that is geopolitical. They have a view of the kingdom that is about military might and force. They have a view of the kingdom that at the coming of the Messiah, the coming of the Christ, Rome would be turned to chaff that would be blown away by the wind and Jerusalem would become the epicenter

of the world, the nations would come and worship God in Jerusalem, and every enemy of God would be destroyed. That was their view of the Messiah.

Now in 2018, we kind of look back on that and go, "Gosh, idiots. Did you not read Isaiah? Did you not have the scroll of Isaiah? Did you not read about the suffering servant? Is it like one of those texts that Old Testament rabbis avoided, like some evangelicals avoid Romans 9-11? You just kind of avoid those scary, difficult chapters? Did you not touch that?" No, no. The idea that the coming of Christ would have this kind of crushing, violent force to it wasn't formed in a vacuum. It was actually formed by a reading of the Old Testament.

I'm going to read Daniel 2 to you, because this is specifically where it came from. In Daniel, chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that wigs him out. He's the king of the known world at that point. As far as the eye could see, Nebuchadnezzar owned it. He has this dream that really freaks him out. It terrifies him, and then he wakes up and he can't get unafraid. It's kind of a dream that's haunting him all day long. Maybe some of you have had dreams like that.

So Nebuchadnezzar calls together his diviners, his witches, his wizards, and says, "Hey, I had this dream. It really wiggled me out. I have no peace in my heart. I have no peace in my mind. I need you to tell me the dream and interpret it for me." To which the diviners said, "Well, tell us the dream and we'll interpret it." Nebuchadnezzar is not biting. He's like, "Well, if you're diviners, you tell *me* the dream and interpret it. Oh, by the way, not to put too much pressure on you, but do it soon or I'm going to kill all of you." A little on-the-job pressure.

They can't do it, but they don't get killed because Daniel shows up. When Daniel shows up, Daniel not only tells him the dream but interprets the dream for him, and it's that dream and its interpretation that first-century Jews would have read, studied, and built their hope on as they sat under the oppression of Rome. Daniel 2, starting in verse 31. If you're wondering what happened in the first 30 verses, that's what I was doing. I was filling in that gap. Here's Daniel telling him the dream.

**"You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.**

**Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken [shattered, crushed] in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This was the dream."**

Now if we're stopping, that dream would wig me out. You have this massive image, you're feeling small, and then out of nowhere a stone shows up and just smashes it all to pieces, and then it's blown away so there's nothing left. Then the rock grows into a mountain, and then the mountain fills the whole earth. That's just a tough night. Then Daniel interprets.

**"This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation."** I love that, because it's just Daniel there. Who's the *we*? I think you know. **"You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold.**

**Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay.**

**And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people.**

**It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."**

Do you see where they're getting that when the Messiah comes it's going to be violent? You have this prophecy that the empire of iron, which they thought was Rome... The bronze before it was the Greeks. You have this idea that when Christ comes he's going to once and for all rid the world of the pagans and establish a kingdom of holiness with the sword. Because how else do you crush an empire of iron?

Keep in mind these are people under the oppression of Rome. They have been slaughtered by the hundreds of thousands. They have been crucified. They have been tortured. Their stuff has been plundered, and where is their hope? In the Christ. When the Christ comes, Rome will get theirs. Then Jesus shows up and there's this whirlwind of excitement about "The kingdom of God is at hand." And what does he start to do? "The kingdom of God is like a farmer who goes out and sows wheat, and then his enemy drops in some weeds, and they both grow up together."

What the Jews are thinking is that the pagans are going to be destroyed and they'll be the ones who are left and it's going to happen quickly. It's going to be a geopolitical military event. Jesus says, "No, no, no. You're going to grow as my people, but the weeds will grow with you, and as righteousness increases, so will evil, and as my kingdom expands, the weeds will be there also." They're thinking Jesus is going to call down legions of angels to destroy the empire, and he says, "No, no, no. The kingdom is going to play out like a mustard seed. It's going to start tiny."

In fact, he's teaching this to a couple hundred people on the other side of the earth. "It's going to go into the ground like a mustard seed, and it's going to grow and grow and grow until it's bigger than any other shrub in the garden. In fact, the birds of the air will build homes in the kingdom once it has grown. In fact, the kingdom of God is like a little bit of leaven put in a large lump of dough. Give it time and it rises and the leaven works its way through every part of the dough. That's what the kingdom of God is like."

Now this should, for you and me in 2018, bring about great encouragement for two reasons. Let me point them out to you. I say one of them to you often. Here's the one I say to you often: you're in Dallas. Do you understand what I'm talking about there? Jesus is saying, "You know what the kingdom of God looks like? The kingdom of God looks like this: Over a long period of time it's going to grow to epic proportions. It's going to fill the earth like a mountain" to a couple hundred peasants in the Galilee area of the Middle East. And you're in Dallas.

In 2018, we get to see that Christ's words are true. Otherwise, why are you and I here? How did that happen? It seems like that little mustard seed that went in the ground has grown and grown and grown. Our brother Luke Baublet is here this weekend from Berlin, and we have friends in Dubai and churches being planted in Iraq.

In May I'm flying to Serbia to preach to about a thousand pastors from all over Europe who are seeing the kingdom of God continuing to expand. It's exploding in South America. It's exploding in North America. I'm telling you, the propaganda that we are a dying breed is overexaggerated. The kingdom of God is growing, and it's large enough now that birds nest in our branches.

The second thing is to not be dismayed by the weeds. In the same way that this passage should bring us hope because we can see that it's happening, it also should remind us that even in our darkest hours the kingdom of God grows. We shouldn't be surprised at the weeds. We shouldn't be surprised at how long this seems to be taking. Jesus corrected their falsely placed hope in military power and political might and put it instead in the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling inside kingdom citizens over a long period of time all over the world until it filled the earth.

On top of Jesus reorienting our hearts with this hope, he actively begins to live out the power of the kingdom, and we see that in three primary ways. But remember this. When the kingdom was established, what we had was order with no chaos, light with no dark. There was no death. There was no disease. The Bible says humankind was naked and unashamed.

There was no such thing as shame, no such thing as brokenness. There was no death. There was no cancer. There was no illness. There was no shame, no depression, no anxiety. There was light, no dark; order, no chaos. So when Jesus comes, he not only preaches that the kingdom of God is at hand, he shows the power of the kingdom over the fallenness and brokenness of sin and death. We see that in three different ways.

First, we see the power of the kingdom breaking through death and sickness via Jesus' *power to heal all diseases*. He heals the lame. He heals the blind. He heals the leprous. He heals present and he heals people who aren't even in his presence. On more than one occasion he was like, "Go home. Your kid is healed." He didn't show up and anoint with oil. He just went, "Go home. They're healed."

He told one guy to stop being dead. Is that not the ultimate healing? "Hey, get up. Nope. You're not dead." There were people who mocked and laughed at Jesus, on two separate occasions tried to

correct Jesus telling death that death had no power. We see the kingdom of God breaking through, and that power is available to citizens of the kingdom.

Now let's chat about that for a second. When you get into kingdom theology (this stuff we're talking about) one of the errors many Christians will make is what's called (I'll define this; I don't usually use terms like this) *overrealized eschatology*. Let me chat about that. *Eschatology* is what ultimately occurs in the end times. How this whole thing ends.

What people will do when we get into truths like this, where the power to heal sickness and diseases is a part of the kingdom of God breaking through the fall of humankind, is they'll take that and overrealize the eschatology and say, "Hey, everybody is going to get healed." That's an overrealized eschatology. It's not true. Here are a couple of reasons why that's not true.

First, there are things God has promised me and that Jesus has bought with his blood that I will not get until all things have been made new. I am promised in 1 Corinthians 15 a resurrected body that feels no pain, that will not die, that is not limited, and that will live forever in the presence of God, and this ain't it. This is a 43-year-old dad bod that injures easily. If this is the resurrection body, let's scrap it all. My knee is tweaked right now. I have no idea what I did. I just slept.

So I have that coming for me, but I don't get it right now. Jesus can heal everyone, but even while he's on earth he doesn't. He doesn't heal everybody on earth. I want you to know what you can expect from me, the rest of our elders, and our pastors. We're going to pray bold, faith-filled prayers asking God to heal without any outs and caveats.

When you get sick and you're in the hospital and they've told you, "There's nothing else we can do," I will not protect my prayers with "Heal this person if you will." The will of God *will* be done. He hasn't asked me to pray that way. He has asked me to pray bold, faith-filled prayers in the name of Jesus and by the blood of Jesus and then hold the results with open hands.

So I'm going to pray for you on that day. I'm going to put my hands on you. I'm going to say, "In the name of Jesus Christ and by his blood I pray that this brother of mine, this sister of mine be healed completely right now miraculously in the name of Jesus Christ." Then I'm just going to hold it with open hands, because he is not a genie in a bottle that does my bidding; he is the Sovereign King of glory, and how could I know what he knows and sees? So we see it in his power to heal.

We also see the breakthrough of the kingdom (this one will be weird for us, but let's play; it's fun) in *his power over demonic powers and principalities*. If you want to, read through the Gospels. Pay attention to how Jesus interacts with demons and demonic forces. There's never an argument. Jesus just talks to them and they obey. In fact, sometimes they speak first and they're terrified.

One of my favorites is "We know who you are: the Holy One of God. Have you come to destroy us before the appointed time?" You want to talk about an emasculated enemy. "Are you going to kill us now? I mean, we know you're eventually going to kill us. Is it now? Because we thought we had another couple thousand years." There's never back talk. There's never any confusion about who has authority.

The breakthrough of the kingdom is power over demonic principalities and forces. That's weird for us, because many of us have no understanding of these things and, honestly, like to categorize struggles and sins in other ways than "Hey, maybe this is demonic," yet the Bible is rich with teaching on and explanations on the demonic powers and principalities of this present age.

One of the things that can torment us, one of the things that can oppress us, one of the things that can break us is demonic oppression and spiritual powers and principalities. I think a theology of powers and principalities missing in modern evangelical understandings of the kingdom really jams us up and oftentimes has us swinging our fists at the air. An understanding of powers and principalities helps us understand the suprahuman nature of evil.

The nature of evil will not be defeated via human means. You, with all your discipline, with all your creatine monohydrate, with all your Peloton rides, with all your whatever's, are not going to be enough to overcome the darkness that is Satan and his demonic powers. I don't care how good of a shot you are, what kind of collection you have in that gun safe. You are outgunned, outmanned, and it will not work with human fleshly power. You'll need the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you try to play in this space via fleshly means, what we see in the Bible is bad things. The book of Acts, the seven sons of Sceva. Paul casts out demons, and they decide *they* want to try that, so they go find a demon-possessed guy and say, "In the name of Jesus Christ, Paul's God, come out." The demon manifests and speaks. "I know Jesus. I've heard of Paul. Who are you?" Then the Bible says the demonized man turns on the seven sons of Sceva and beats them all bloody and naked.

That's how you know you lost the fight. If you came in with pants and left without them, you lost. It doesn't matter if you got a good shot in. It doesn't matter if you DDT'd him once. If when the fight started you had pants on and when it was over you were no longer wearing them, you got drove. There's no, "Let's check the cards, Alex." You lost.

This is what happens when with our flesh we begin to engage in spiritual realities. It's a good way to get whipped. On top of that, there are some real complexities here that should create humility and dependency. Here's what I mean by *complexities*. This has so piqued my curiosity in my own personal study lately.

In Mark, chapter 9, Jesus is coming down from the mountain, and this father comes up to him and says, "Hey, my son is demonized. He'll turn into stone and throw himself into a fire. Your disciples have been trying to cast this demon out, and they're unable to do it." Now the disciples aren't rookies at this. The disciples have been given the power by Jesus to heal diseases and cast out demons, and they actually have gone and done this. So they have reps.

In fact, if you remember, they actually had to be rebuked for it because they came back all giddy, like, "Even the spirits obey us," and Jesus was like, "Well, that's cool and all, but what you *should* rejoice in is that your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. That's great that you have power over the spirits, but that's not what you should rejoice in. You should rejoice in me knowing you and loving you and you being secure in my love."

So these aren't guys this is new to. For many of us, if a demon manifested, we might even wet ourselves. We'd have no idea what to do. We'd probably just get out the Bible and start reading it and have no clue. These are not those men. They have played in this space, and they can't get this demon out.

So Jesus shows up. The father comes and says, "Hey, your guys can't do it. Can you help me?" and Jesus says, "Do you believe?" He says, "I do believe. Help my unbelief." That is one of my favorite sentences in the Bible. "I do believe. Help my unbelief." So Jesus goes, "Okay" and comes over. Then there's this weird interview that takes place, where Jesus asks the father, "How long has he been like this?" The father says, "Since birth."

"Okay. How does it play out?"

"Well, when the demon manifests, my son turns into stone, and the demon throws him into the fire or into water trying to destroy him."

It's like that clued in Jesus to what kind of spirit this was. So he drives out the demon. There's not a lot of fanfare. There's no screeching. Jesus is just like, "Get out," and then the kid is normal. The disciples come up to him afterward and ask, "Hey, why couldn't we cast out that demon?" Listen to Jesus' response. "That kind only comes out through prayer and fasting." Already my mind is blown. Okay, there are kinds now? Are they big and strong? Are they fast and slow?

How does the demonic realm work that there are these kinds that the disciples, on the authority of Christ, can just say, "Leave" and they leave, and then there are the others where they're like, "Leave" and they're like, "No"?

"Leave."

"No."

"Leave."

"No."

"Okay, I have to go pray and fast."

How does this all work? There's a complexity here, but Jesus is showing the power of the kingdom and his absolute authority over all kinds of spiritual principalities and powers.

Lastly, we see the breakthrough of the kingdom in *natural miracles*. Jesus turns water into wine. He walks on the water. He rebukes a storm and it listens. He curses a fig tree and it shrivels. Remember how God had originally ordered the kingdom in Eden? Chaos unleashed as the kingdom fell, and the kingdom now inaugurated controls the natural order back into the peace of the God who created it. So we see the kingdom breaking through.

Now, who gets to get into this kingdom? This is the stuff I get really geeked up about. Here's who *doesn't* get in. This answer might surprise you. You will not get into the kingdom of God based on your works and good deeds. Look right at me. *You will not get into the kingdom of God with your*

*good works and your good deeds.* It doesn't work that way. I know you're hearing me, but I have to wonder if you're actually hearing me.

You will not earn your way into the kingdom, because getting into the kingdom cannot be earned. In fact, the more self-righteous you are and the more confident you are in your own righteousness, the more difficult it is to get into the kingdom, if not *impossible* to get into the kingdom. The Pharisees, the ruling religious elite of the day, are better than you. They're better than me.

They're more serious about their Bible than we are. They're more serious about holiness than we are. They're more serious about living the way they think God has asked them to live than we are. They are in every way more disciplined than you and I are, and here's a conversation Jesus has with them in Matthew 21.

**"What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And [the son] answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.'" Listen to Jesus' response to this. "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.'"**

Isn't that a terrifying sentence? And if your life is filled with failure, brokenness, and regret, isn't that one of the best sentences ever? Who's going into the kingdom? Not those who feel like they can earn their way in; only those who go in by the free gift of God's grace. Now hear me. I think this is one of those things that can set you free.

All your religious activity outside of a relationship with God and dwelling in the presence of God is for naught. Jesus looks at the most elite, disciplined, religious group I know of and says, "The prostitutes and tax collectors are going in before you are." If that's true, who gets in? If you're a church kid, I'm guessing you're especially going, "Okay, who gets in?"

Jesus in two places explicitly says, "Here's how you get in." The first one is found in Mark 10:14. You get into the kingdom by entering as a child. Let me show you this text. **"But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant..."** What made Jesus so angry? The Bible tells us children loved to be around Jesus. If you'll just stop for a second, think about what kind of personality Jesus must have if children want to be around him.

He doesn't have a furrowed brow. He's not super serious about everything and a little bit frustrated with everybody. I don't know if you've been around children. Children don't really like to be around that. "Oh, you're a furrowed brow, crusty grump? You're my kind of people." Kids want to avoid that type of adult.

It's such a problem that the disciples have decided Jesus doesn't have that kind of time. "Children? That's JV work. You get away from Jesus. He only has a few years here. He's going to give himself to things that matter." This enraged Jesus. He grew indignant at this. Why? Well, he explains why. **"Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."**

*The kingdom belongs to those with childlike faith.* Not *childish* faith; *childlike* faith. There's a huge difference between being childish and being childlike. If you don't know the difference, *childishness* is what you try to discipline out of your children, and it's never delighted in when it exists in an adult. *Childlikeness* is celebrated, awed, loved in children and can even then be celebrated in adults if, by the grace of God, we can hold fast to our childlike faith.

So what does it mean to have childlike faith? First, there's an admission of neediness. There is an admission of dependency. We are needy and we are dependent, and that concept in 2018 is revolutionary. Moms, let me talk to you for a second. Tell me you don't feel the weight of trying to be a perfect mother.

Tell me you don't in this environment go, "Oh my gosh. My 6-month-old isn't reading Hammett. They're not going to college. They're probably going to end up strung out on drugs and a murderer. God forgive me. I gave them non-organic goldfish, so it's only a matter of time until their brains are rotted. I have failed. I have failed. I have failed." Listen to what the kingdom does. The kingdom goes, "Oh no, no, no. Parenting is impossible. Get in here and let me love you through it."

Dads, tell me you don't feel the weight in 2018 of having it all together, making it all work, making sure everybody is happy and everything is done. What a crushing, foolish thing. We are far more dependent and needy than we can imagine. Every once in a while, in God's grace, he'll cut you and let you see it. We're far more dependent.

Brothers, which one of you can love your wife like Christ loved the church without the power of the Holy Spirit? I'm sure you can *manage* your wife. Do you know what management looks like? "I'd

better clean this sink, because if I don't clean this sink she's going to freak out and make my life hell for two weeks. So let me manage her. Let me do *this* so she won't do *that*." That's management. That's not loving her like Christ loved the church.

Sisters, which one of you might respect your husband without the power of the Holy Spirit? I'm not talking about managing him; I'm talking about respecting him and building him up in affirmation and love, being an expert in his strengths. You're going to need the Spirit for that. Singles, which one of you is going to be able to live a holy, righteous, moral life for the glory of God without the power of the Spirit?

You are far more dependent and needy than you think. The kingdom belongs to those who see this and know this. We can melt into our weakness, rejoicing that he never grows tired and weary and he is not weak.

Lastly, *the kingdom belongs to those who repent and believe*. We already covered this text. Let me read it again. This is Mark 1:15. "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand...**" So the kingdom of God is here. It's breaking through. You see this in the miracles of Jesus. He's reorienting our hopes around what the gospel moving through the earth is going to look like

So what should we do with childlike faith? Now you repent and believe. *Repentance* is a word that is kind of falling out of favor with evangelicalism and with Christians as we try to be cool enough for the world, try to soften what it means to follow Jesus. Have you picked up on that? "Let's lower the bar of what it looks like to be a man or a woman of God and just create an easy believism that doesn't cost us our lives."

The best way to do that is to get rid of the word *repent* and "therapeutize" it. "Let's take *sin* and *repentance* and throw those words out, and let's just replace it all with the word *struggle*." "Oh, you struggle with that." Hear me. There are legitimate struggles that are not tied to sin, but a lot of times we're taking sin and naming it a struggle so we can make it our pet and not repent. The way into the kingdom is not struggle but repentance.

For so many of us, we've made this thing the Bible clearly calls a sin... We've changed the title to *struggle*, and then what happens is because it's a struggle and not a sin we never feel the weight of needing to repent of it, so we manage the struggle rather than putting to death the sin via repentance. No wonder we're not walking in power and victory.

Where there is struggle, let us faithfully love, support, and pray for one another. Where there is sin, let us repent and seek to put it to death. This is the path of life. This is life in the kingdom. The invitation is laid out to all who will hear and come in. Why does Jesus come? Remember? We talk about this all the time. Jesus comes not to pronounce judgment on the world but to save the world from condemnation.

How does he do that? By saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Get in here." You've been invited into the safety of the King's strength. You've been invited into the presence of ultimate power. You've been invited in to melt in your humanness in the suprahuman God of all creation, even if you're a tax collector and a prostitute. That's unreal. That's the kingdom.

In the same way it would be bad for you to encapsulate David and Goliath, Noah and the flood, Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, Jacob and his dreams, Isaiah and Jeremiah...the mistake of encapsulating those and not seeing them as the parts of the same story...it's a pretty big error for you to encapsulate your own life as though you are an encapsulated story unto yourself.

Brother, sister, I'm going to say something hard. I know I'm saying it, and I know it's a hard saying, but I'm going to hope the weight of it will serve you well. When all is said and done, no one in this room or on earth will have a choice at whether or not their life brings glory to God. You will bring glory to God as an object of his grace and mercy, repenting and with childlike faith, walking in the kingdom, or you will bring glory to God as you shake your fist in treachery against his kindness and become an object of his just, right wrath despite a lifetime of him pursuing you and wooing you.

You being here today is seen in the heavenlies. God knows you have heard. So even the most hardened atheist who will shake his fist at the heavens simply becomes, God help them, an object of God's right and just wrath in that he has their whole lives invited them into the mercy of the kingdom only for them to continue in their treachery. Your life is caught up in these cosmic realities. If you're like, "I don't really like that," I'm sorry.

You're here today and you're hearing this good news, an invitation into the kingdom. I've prayed all week that when we talk about childlike faith you'll feel today... For whatever reason, in this season of your life you've just felt, "I am in need, and I'm so exhausted pretending I'm not in need with all this need" or "I'm so desperate right now." I've prayed all week that this word would fall on ears

and hearts that find themselves in that space in the hopes you might hear and receive the good news of the gospel that the kingdom of God is at hand. Let's pray.

Father, I just ask in your mercy that you would build us up and encourage us with your love. I pray for many of us who have redefined sin as struggle and have not been serious about putting those things to death but actually have taken on the identity of that thing that you would strengthen us and help us to see sin for sin and long to put it to death.

I pray you'd bring clarity to our hearts even now about the difference between struggle and sin, that we might not feel overweighted with "Oh man. Is this struggle sin?" but that you would provide clarity in that space. I pray you'd lead us into repentance and lives of victory. I pray you'd give us hope, even as many of us in this room are in seasons of hopelessness. We thank you that the wheat grows and the tares grow alongside of it.

Thank you that in 2018 we can look around at the size of the mustard tree and marvel. Thank you that all over the world today men and women like us have gathered in different languages with different instruments but the same Word and the same Holy Spirit to make much of the name and renown of Jesus Christ. We love you. Help us. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.