

Text: John 3:3-8

Title: “The Kingdom’s Citizens”

Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Last week I began a series entitled, “Kingdom Come.” We’re wanting to understand what it means to desire, pray for and work for what Jesus taught us to desire, pray for and work for ... for God’s Kingdom to come. We’re wanting to understand what it means for us to obey Jesus when He said in Matthew 6:33, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

We talked last week about the fact that the Kingdom of God has already come. God is eternal and He has no beginning and no end. So His Kingdom is eternal with no beginning or end. But then we saw how the eternal King stepped into time and space took on a human body in the person of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is on display in the person of Jesus Christ. If you want to know how the Kingdom of God operates in a life, look at Jesus. So King Jesus comes to establish the Kingdom of God on this earth. And through the Spirit of King Jesus that Kingdom is still now coming. It expands with every instance where God’s will is done ... when a person is saved and comes under the reign of King Jesus ... when by our words, actions, thoughts and decisions King Jesus is exalted and His values are pressed into this sinful world. In many ways this is a secret Kingdom now, but it is every bit as real as you are.

We also learn from Scripture that there are kingdoms in conflict. There’s the Kingdom of God and there’s the kingdom ruled by what the Bible calls the “king of this world.” Since the Garden of Eden the devil has inspired rebellion and ruin on the earth. He holds the souls of billions of people captive to sin and they are enemies of God. But remember that King Jesus has come and by His death and resurrection He has broken the power of sin and the kingdom of darkness. For two thousand years King Jesus has been rescuing people from the dark kingdom and expanding His own Kingdom as one by one people put their trust in Him. Our eternal life is simply our life lived as citizens of the Kingdom of God under the rule and the reign of our King Jesus.

So if we are desiring, praying for and working for the Kingdom of God to come and His will to be done then we will constantly be thinking about how God wants expand His Kingdom by bringing more people under His rule and reign. Jesus told many (parables) stories to illustrate the Kingdom of God. And in one of them He said...

Matthew 13:47 - “The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.

Fish represents people who are sought by the King to enter into His Kingdom. So for us to pray, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done,” means that we desire, pray for and work for people to be “caught” by Jesus. It means that for every relationship we have, whether it’s family, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, teammates or whatever, we desire, pray for and work for God’s Kingdom to come in their lives.

Let’s open our Bibles to one of the scores of instances where Jesus refers to the Kingdom of God, Luke 18:15-29. Here in Luke 18 Jesus shows us how a person *enters* or receives the Kingdom of God and then how the Kingdom of God is *exhibited* in the lives of Kingdom citizens. **Read Luke 18:15-25.**

Notice first that Kingdom citizens...

1. ENTER THE KINGDOM THROUGH CHILD-LIKE DEPENDENCE

It was a common thing for Jesus to attract young families. They brought their babies and their children to Jesus for Him to touch them and bless them. There was just something about Jesus that attracted little ones to Him. Jesus loved everything about children.

ILLUSTRATION –We are blessed to have our oldest daughter Allison, her husband Anthony and our youngest granddaughter Eleanor in our church. And Ellie is coming to help me for a minute this morning. Ellie, you have something big happening this week. What is it? What kind of party are you going to have? And who is coming to your party? Now are you sure you’re going to have a party? How do you know?

Let me point out something here that we’ll see all the way through our study of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom always seems to be focused on those at the lowest level, in human terms, not the highest. King Jesus values the children, the poor, the sick, the hungry and the suffering. Kingdom people will always be found among the lowest, most helpless in society ... those who cannot do for themselves, those who are dependent upon mercy and grace. In fact, Jesus said that to enter the Kingdom you have to get low ... you have to become like a little child.

Luke 18:16 - But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

What are the qualities of child-likeness that Jesus commends? Well, for one thing children are humble. They don't mind admitting their dependence on their parents or teachers or others. In Matthew 18:4 Jesus said, “Whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

We often talk about child-like faith. They trust the people they depend on. They presume that mom and dad know what's best for them and they obey ... at least most of the time. They tend to be teachable. They believe and accept what their parents say is true.

Notice that the Kingdom “belongs” to those who become like little children. When we put our trust in Christ and follow Him eternal life in the Kingdom of God is our inheritance.

Colossians 1:12-13 – (The) Father ... has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

So back to our text in Luke 18, Jesus says...

Luke 18:17 - Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

Notice the Kingdom has to be received. It cannot be earned; it has to be received by faith and repentance. Notice that it has to be entered. No one is in the Kingdom automatically. It is to be entered with the faith of a child. People become citizens of the Kingdom of God when by faith and repentance they surrender to King Jesus.

One night Jesus had a conversation with a religious man named Nicodemus who wanted to know more about Jesus. And Jesus said to him:

John 3:3 - “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

So there's a clear distinction between being a religious person like Nicodemus was and being a citizen of the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus was a fine church-going person, but that does not automatically mean one is a citizen of the Kingdom of God. To enter (see) the Kingdom of God an inner transformation has to occur ... a transformation that Jesus calls being "born again" through faith in Christ.

ILLUSTRATION – Let me show you what this looks like in a real life situation. Some of you know who Steve McQueen is. For those of you who don't, he was a movie star who, in the 1960s and 1970s, was called "The King of Cool." He was Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise and Dwayne Johnson ("The Rock") all wrapped up into one. But Steve McQueen was one of the most arrogant, selfish men around. At the height of his popularity Steve McQueen was asked if he believed in God. He replied, "I believe in me. God will be number one as long as I'm number one." He was famous for his drunkenness, womanizing and cruelty to the people around him. He had one failed marriage after another. But those closest to him knew that Steve McQueen was coming to see what so many other celebrities had come to see ... when you get to the top there's nothing there. But God put some people into Steve McQueen's life that saw where he was headed. There was his stunt double, Stan Barrett, who was a strong Christian and talked to Steve about Christ. Later in his life McQueen took up flying, and his flight instructor, Sammy Mason, was a strong believer who saw the emptiness in Steve's life and talked to him about Christ. Sammy began to see Steve softening and searching and one day he took a chance and invited Steve to go to church with him. Steve's live-in girlfriend was shocked when Steve told her they were going to church. For three months Steve McQueen and his girlfriend attended church every Sunday with Sammy. One day after church Steve went up to the pastor, Leonard DeWitt, introduced himself and invited the pastor to go to lunch. Over lunch that day Steve leaned forward and said, "You want to know if I'm a born-again Christian, right?" The pastor said, "Steve, that's all that is really important to me." Steve quietly revealed that during a worship service a few weeks back when the pastor invited people to pray with him to receive Christ, Steve had prayed and it had happened. "Yes, I'm born again." Shortly after coming to Christ Steve McQueen was diagnosed with aggressive cancer and within a few months he was dead. But before he died Steve McQueen showed that he really had entered the Kingdom of God. The people closest to him noticed he was a different man. He married his live-in girlfriend. He became generous and genuinely concerned for others. He wrote letters to his family and friends to let them know that he had become a citizen of the Kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Unless you are born again you will never see the Kingdom of God."

So Kingdom citizens enter the Kingdom of God through child-like dependence. But also, Kingdom citizens...

2. EXHIBIT THE KINGDOM THROUGH CHRIST-LIKE SURRENDER

The Kingdom of God is simply the reign of Jesus as Lord and King in our lives. It is the Holy Spirit of King Jesus working in us, orchestrating our lives to reflect and to build the Kingdom of God. Kingdom people are people who have abandoned their lives for the sake of the Kingdom. And Jesus makes that clear from the beginning.

This is what Jesus has in mind as He encounters this wealthy young man here in Luke 18. In contrast to that little child an affluent, influential Jewish leader came up to Jesus to ask him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus saw through the man's façade and that he was really proud that he was so moral. His wealth had made him feel self-secure and confident. That's why Jesus said to him, "Eternal life means you need to abandon your wealth and come to follow Me." Jesus knew the man couldn't trust Christ as long as he trusted His wealth. And the man sadly walked away from Christ that day because he wasn't willing to humble himself and make that kind of commitment. And Jesus applied this for His disciples He said...

Luke 18:24-25 - Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Why? Because they won't come like little children. This rich man could not bring himself to "get low." It's the same thing with people who are "rich in righteousness." By that I mean they are trusting in their own righteousness to earn them a place in heaven. In Matthew 7:21 Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of heaven." One day Jesus shocked some who were good, upstanding, religious people when He said:

Matthew 21:31b - "The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you."

You see, Jesus has His eye on those whom the religious people have disregarded and written off. God is as interested in people who are out at Billy Bob's on Saturday night as He is in people who are sitting here on Sunday mornings. Does that shock you? He's as interested in how we relate to them *out there* as He is in how we relate to one another *in here*. I'm not saying what we do here on Sundays

and at other times as the Body of Christ isn't important. I'm saying that if our concept of the Christian life and what it means to be a disciple is only about what happens here on Sundays then we are missing a huge part of what it means to be Kingdom citizens.

Kingdom citizens exhibit the Kingdom of God through Christ-like surrender. Jesus set the example for us when He surrendered Himself to the will of the Father and died on the Cross. Look at Luke 18:28. The disciples are starting to get it and Jesus reassures them: **Read Luke 18:28-30.**

Gene Mims says it this way: "Kingdom living is not an escape; it is an engagement." It's not an escape from the hardships of life; it is a costly engagement against the kingdom of darkness that will result in our suffering and sacrificing for Christ's Kingdom to come.

ILLUSTRATION – Becoming part of the Kingdom of God is not just about becoming a citizen. I'm becoming a soldier in His army. When you enlist in the military everything changes. My dad was career Air Force. It was like the Air Force owned him. The Air Force told him how to dress and where he was to live. I remember the day when he sat us all down and told us that he was being sent to Vietnam. He had orders from the top.

As Kingdom citizens and soldiers we accept what John Piper calls a "wartime lifestyle." Most of us here haven't ever had to endure this, but there were times in our nation's history when we were engaged in a global conflict that required sacrifices of every citizen, even those who weren't in the military. And for those of us who are citizens of the Kingdom of God we're in a war. The Kingdom of God is fighting for souls that need to be rescued from the kingdom of darkness. So we take on a "wartime lifestyle." We ask ourselves, "How can my life count to advance the Kingdom of Christ? How does the way I spend my money and my time and my prayer work toward the Kingdom of God coming to the people around me and around the world? And the battle for most of us is that we become too comfortable with the things of this world, forgetting we're Kingdom citizens who must be engaged in the quest for the Kingdom of God to come and for His will to be done. That's what it means to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness. And He promises that He will cover every need we have as we trust in Him.

ILLUSTRATION - Mark Batterson in his book *Chase the Lion* tells the story of a man named J.W. Tucker. Back in 1964 Tucker went into the Congo in Africa in the middle of a civil war to take the Gospel to them. It was a very dangerous time.

Because of his boldness in proclaiming the Gospel J.W. Tucker was captured by Congolese rebels who tied his hands behind his back and tortured him. Then he along with sixty other Christians were thrown with hands bound into a crocodile-infested river where they all perished. Before J.W. Tucker went to the Congo one of his good friends tried to talk him out of it. His friend said, "If you go you won't come out." Tucker replied to his friend, "God didn't tell me I had to come out. He only told me I had to go in."

Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

You can try to dodge this and ignore this, but it doesn't go away. If you are a citizen of the Kingdom of God this is what it looks like.