

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**The Kingdom of God**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, I thank you for gathering us together as you have and I just am amazed and full of wonder at the gifts that you've given to us. The gift of your Son, Lord, is a gift that we will continue to spend the rest of our life unpacking, the gift of your word, and Father, the gift of your Holy Spirit. And Lord, we just this morning, we're going to be examining a new series, we're going to be looking at the kingdom of God and that, too, is a gift. And so, Lord, this morning as we open up your book, would you open up our minds, would you open up our spirit, would you accompany us with your Holy Spirit and may you make this of lasting value, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, I am a big fan of an organization that's known as The Frontier Alliance. I don't know if you've ever heard but they're heavily involved in supporting the underground church in Iran and they also post on Facebook. And I was recently taken with a post that they had that started with a large headline banner that proclaimed "To Hell With Your Culture Wars." And it was followed

by a statement that said this: "If his kingdom were of this world we would fight. But it is not of this world and we shouldn't be either. The only war we're fighting is against things we can't see: For those we can see we take the low road and wash a bunch of dirty feet."

There's no denying we're smack dab in the middle of a culture war. The pandemic, we have an economic collapse, riots, they've all made it painfully obvious that there is a huge divide in this country. Rather there's a huge collection of different divides in this country: There is rich versus poor, there is black versus white, there's gay versus straight and a half dozen others. But what matters most to us is the divide between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. Perhaps the most important question we face today in the middle of this series of culture wars is, okay, how do we fight those wars? What unifying theme gives us the ability to address issues of wealth and race and sexuality and spirituality that all of us are facing? Well, when it comes to culture wars I think The Frontier Alliance gets it exactly right. But if you don't have the proper understanding of the kingdom of God and how you fit in it, you're not ever going to have the proper ability to deal with these culture wars that now surround us. So this morning I'm actually going to be revisiting a series that I did 20 years ago, and it was about the kingdom of God. And this

morning I'm going to ask three very basic questions. The first one is what is the kingdom of God; the second one is what are kingdom citizens like; and the third and perhaps most important is how can we tell if we are citizens of this kingdom?

So first, what is the kingdom of God? Well, as you all know we're coming to the Fourth of July and this is the day that we celebrate our independence from England. And one of the least explored events in if all of the gospels is an event that's barely mentioned that marks a far more important independence day. It occurs at the end of Mark's gospel in Mark 16 where Jesus is giving last instructions to his disciples. This is *Mark 16:19*. He says: *Then after speaking to them, the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.* This was the start, the start of Jesus' coronation as king. He was and he is today the King of kings and Lord of lords. As R.C. Sproul puts it: "In America we celebrate July 4th as independence day on which the colonies broke free from the oppression of King George. But we virtually ignore the day when our King was invested on high and gained independence for us from the prince of darkness. The ascension of Jesus was the most important political event in history because in it he was installed in the highest seat of authority in the cosmos." Folks, that, that is reality. I mean there really is a kingdom and a king far more than anything we experience and it's a kingdom that God

brought to earth proclaiming it through his Son Jesus Christ. In *Matthew 9* it says: *Jesus went through all of the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.*

Now the good news of the kingdom is the good news of the gospel and it's that God has found a solution to the bad news that all of us were born into. And that is that all of us were born fallen, imperfect sons and daughters of Adam and each of us is kind of pre-wired to rebel against the God of that kingdom and to side with the God of this kingdom. All of us stood before God condemned already for who we were as well as for what we did. And yet while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. So that's the good news of the kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ so wanted us to understand the kingdom that he constantly sought to explain it to us by virtue of analogy. Time and again Jesus sought to get us to understand the kingdom by telling us what it was like. It was like a man who sowed good seed, it was like a mustard seed itself, it was like yeast that was worked into flour or a treasure hidden in a field, it was like a net that was thrown into a lake or a king throwing a banquet. Time and again Jesus turned to parables to explain just what the kingdom was about. And yet if I were to ask you this morning just what is meant by the kingdom of God, my guess is that many of us would struggle for an answer. Many might rightfully

think, well that question is not really fair. After all, the kingdom of God, it's not some amplified version of Disney's Magic Kingdom, it's not something that you can describe like an amusement park. It is far greater than human beings can grasp. God says this in *Isaiah 55*, he says: *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* You see, our minds literally cannot grasp the enormity of the King or his kingdom. I mean if someone was to put a gun to my head demanding that I explain algebra to my cat, I would have an easier task than we have explaining the kingdom to non-believers. I mean if you want to start to understand the kingdom of God, you first have to start by addressing the higher reality that exists above and beyond the reality that all of us experience every day in our every day lives. If I say to you "what is reality," you're going to think about school or work or shopping or whatever you're physically involved in at the moment. It's what we can grasp and manage with our physical abilities. And when God says that his kingdom is not of this world well, we can easily fall prey to the notion that it's a little less than real. I mean if my car is not working, it's just going to sit there in the driveway staring at me until it's fixed. I mean that's real, you know, it's physical, it's present, and it demands a response that's physical and present as well. Well, not

so with any aspect of our life that is outside of the realm of the physically present. I mean if we can't see, touch, hear, smell, or taste something, its presence really becomes a matter of choice. You know, a broken car, I mean, that's real. A broken promise, a broken commitment, a broken command seem to disappear and evaporate effortlessly as long as we aren't willing to pursue it. And as long as we keep the kingdom of God bound up in this notion that it is less real than a physical reality, we bleed it of its power to transform our lives. Paul understood this. Paul understood this pretty well and he put it in terms of things that are seen and things that are unseen in *2 Corinthians 4*. This is what he said. He said: *We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

I want you to take a second, just think about what was the most important thing to you. What was the most important seeing thing in the world to you as an infant? I remember seeing one of my little grandkids running around looking for their binky, and it was a little shredded piece of a towel that they hung onto for dear life. Back then it meant everything to them. Now it means absolutely nothing. But you know, you can carry that notion through your entire life with only one major difference, and that is, those seeing things that we cling to, they just get bigger and

grander.

And what was the most important thing to you as a teenager? I mean if you are a teenager, what is the thing that matters most to you today? I mean for me that was -- that's easy. I look back and what mattered most to me as a teenager was my motorcycle. It's what I lived for, it's what I dreamed about, read about and polished incessantly. It was my most prized position. It was my life. Today in all likelihood that thing is somewhere rusting in a pile of metal and rubber in somebody's junkyard. It is now a no thing. Nothing. It's no longer a reality as a something. And as adults, you see, we understandably look at our families and our homes and our careers as the most important thing only because they are our present physical reality. But in reality they're just bigger seen things. I mean as Paul says, the seen things are those things that are transient. And they, too, will at some point become unreal. Just go to a nursing home. I've done this on a number of occasions. I sit down and talk to someone who's sadly just there waiting to die. Ask him or her what is the most important thing to them today? Well, they may tell you about the fine home that they once had or the wonderful career they enjoyed at some time or even the family that they raised. But you know, none of that counts for anything unless, unless they're citizens of the kingdom.

Janice and I walk the same walk that we've walked every day for -- almost every day for about 20 years now. And our walk takes us past a place that used to belong to a Jewish man named Harry who I became good friends with, shared the gospel with, I don't think he ever bought it. He was a very, very proud man and what he was most proud of was his organic garden. And he had every right to be proud, I mean, it was absolutely gorgeous, like something out of a magazine. There was flowers and vegetables in abundance and everything was ordered and neat and tidy. And he used to write articles about it, I think he even got it published in a magazine. But Harry died six years ago. His house was sold, his garden was plowed under and grass seed was sown on top of it. And every day we walk by where that garden used to be, and there's absolutely no trace whatsoever that it ever even existed. I think of *Psalm 103* which says this: *As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.* The garden is gone, the house has been remodeled, the neighbors are all new, none of them have any idea who Harry was. Every trace of his existence is gone. *And its place knows it no more.* This is the fate of every one of us who lives our lives outside the kingdom. They don't realize what is happening to them but this is literally what is happening to them. They are literally evaporating. *James 4:14* says: *"What is your life?"* It says, *"for you are a mist that*



*appears for a little time and then vanishes."* It's truly sad things that we've bought the lie that the kingdom of this world tells us constantly that we need to pour all of our lives and all of our energy into this mist so that it can evaporate along with us in the end. And all of those material things that we load and invest with meaning and significance, it turns out that they are mist. And all those misty things that we think of like faith and prayer and godly living, it turns out that those are the rock bottom realities that neither moth nor rust can destroy forever. You mean the material and the misty in the end turn out to be the exact opposite of what the world tells us it is. And the only thing that really matters is what Jesus told us in *Matthew 6:33*. He says this: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

Okay. So it's important for us to grapple with this idea of the kingdom of God. What is the definition? What is the kingdom of God? Well here's my definition. It's the already and not yet reign of King Jesus over all of the universe. Already, not yet because some of it is already unfolded and some of it is yet to happen. This is a kingdom that began with the arrival of Christ on earth. And he came here to defeat the lord of this earth and to rescue and ransom his sheep by offering up his life on a cross. And in the course of his ministry, Jesus would frequently announce

that the kingdom has come. In one sense he was absolutely accurate, I mean, Jesus' presence marshaled in this new kingdom where his church would be the physical manifestation of Christ on earth, but Jesus also stated many other things about his kingdom moving through time to a future destination where it would be more fully realized, where his reign on earth would be clear and present and obvious to all the inhabitants of earth. So this "already/not yet" kingdom is summed up in a statement from the Lord's prayer. And Jesus says this, he says: *"Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Because the kingdom has come and the kingdom will come, it is already and not yet and nothing and no power on earth can stop it. I mean the kingdom of God is as real as a freight train that is moving from eternity past right through the present into the kingdom to come, and there is not a thing that a human being can do to alter its course or slow it down because it's the will of the King. You have two choices, you can either get on board or you can let it pass you by. Actually there's three choices, you can dare to try to stand in the way of it. And some did like Chairman Mao in China or Stalin in Russia or Hitler in Germany. And they may have felt that they could prosper for a while but in the end the train flattened them as it will do to every leader attempting to stop it since the Garden of Eden.

And now you may think the Lord's prayer is not much of a definition of a kingdom. And you probably would be right because there's a problem in defining the kingdom because there's too much kingdom to define. We have a hard time explaining even large earthly kingdoms, let alone the kingdom of God. When I mean somebody tells you what is it like to be an American? We say, well, it's God, mom, and apple pie because those words at least attempt to capture a little piece of the essence of America. You see, we have to settle for little pieces because the picture itself is just too big. So that's why the definition leaves a little bit wanting.

What about the citizens of the kingdom of God? How do you become citizens of a kingdom that you don't really define well and you can't really grasp? Well, in this case our inability to grasp the kingdom becomes an asset instead of a liability. You see, Jesus insisted that the way we become citizens of this kingdom is through the same profoundly naive trust you will find in a child.

I was thinking back some 20 years, some 20 years to the time when my granddaughter Madeline was two or three years old. And I remember once going to their house and I go into the house and I remember Madeline's in the corner and I hear her singing "A, B, C, D, E", she's singing her ABCs, getting it all down. She's learning the most basic building block of education that any of us has but

there was something far more important that she was learning as well. Again, it was something I never even thought about until I was in the mid-20s and that was the kingdom of God. You see, Madeline used to sing her ABCs but there was another song that she sang very, very frequently that contains what one theologian stated was the most profound set of words in the English language. And it's a song that simply says, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong, they are weak but he is strong." I mean Maddy used to sing that song not because she had some deep sense of conviction but to her it was just the truth. I mean at the age of three there were some things that Madeline knew much better than we know. I mean she knew that the Bible was the word of God and that it was something to stand on because that's all she knew. She knew that Jesus is the boss of the whole world. She knew that Jesus was God, and she knew that because unseen things are no problem to a child.

See we're the ones who have to slog our way through cynicism and distrust and unbelief to arrive at our understanding of the kingdom of God. It's we adults who have to take the long way around to get to the kingdom. We want empirical data. We want to have indisputable evidence. We want to insist that there's a rational basis for our faith because there is a rational basis for our faith. Jesus Christ was a real person who really was crucified,

buried, and raised on the third day. And we can produce historical and philosophical proof that he did. Or, or we can be like Madeline who just accepts Jesus as Lord, who just accepts it as a reality no different from the other realities a three-year-old can grapple with and understand, things like cats are soft, snow is cold, Jesus is Lord. I mean those are simple baseline realities that two- or three-year-olds grapple with and grab effortlessly. And it's precisely what Jesus was getting at when he said in *Matthew 18*: *"Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* So childlike trust is a must for kingdom citizens.

Now the second word that describes a kingdom citizen is the word "obedience." *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done."* See, a kingdom citizen is a person who has undergone a transformation centered around this word "obedience." Actually he or she has undergone something far more radical than a transformation, more accurately it's called a transplanted. Donald Grey Barnhouse used to speak of born again believers as people on whom God did transplant surgery. He said every human being is born with a will that is implacably hostile to its creator as a result of the fall and that our natural wills will never ever turn toward our God on their own. And again God made that clear in *Romans 3*, he said: *No one seeks for God.* But then God does something miraculous in the life of his

sheep. And Barnhouse said when God moves to redeem one of his own, the first thing he does is he takes their old "willer" out of them and he inserts a brand new "willer" back into them, a will that is now capable of obedience. And God describes that process in the scripture that should be familiar to all of us by now. It's *Ezekiel 36*. This is God explaining his transplant surgery. He says: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* Now when God says I will put my Spirit, even back in the Old Testament that word "Spirit" is capitalized, it's referring to the Holy Spirit. When he says I will put my Holy Spirit within you, it's God himself taking up residence inside the believer. That's where our transplanted "willer" comes from. It's God's Holy Spirit that now moves us to follow his decrees and be careful to keep his laws. And without that heart transplant, there's no way, there's no way that my will is going to step aside for his. And with a transplanted heart I can finally now see the kingdom at last.

Jesus used a term that's been hopelessly abused to describe becoming a kingdom citizen. He used the term, and we've heard it a million times, the term "born again." And really he's describing a

transformation that is so huge it can only be described as being born for a second time. And Jesus said in *John 3*: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" What Jesus is describing is that when you are born again, you start operating the brand new set of spiritual senses. Those senses come from being indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. And if you're not born again, all this talk of the kingdom, it's just going to sound like gobbledegook. It's like trying to explain the color orange to a man who's born blind. I mean you quickly find you have no point of reference. I mean you can say that orange is red with a little bit of yellow thrown in, but "red" and "yellow" are meaningless words to a man who was born blind. And a man or woman who is not born again has no spiritual point of reference. They're left with their own spirit and their own will, both of which are by nature hostile to God. *Romans 8* says this, it says: *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* I mean he's saying basically the mind that every single one of us is born with, that natural mind, the flesh, it's hostile to God and it cannot submit to his

laws. I mean there's no thought whatsoever of *thy will be done* because my will is the will that matters. And you know, it's easy to read passages like this and think that sinful people who are hostile to God are just nasty people. But that's a costly mistake to make, I mean, some of the nicest people that I have ever met, they have minds set on the flesh. I've met folks who are kind, compassionate, and thoughtful who also have sinfully hostile minds that will not submit to God. In fact it's very possible that some of them are sitting in this room this morning.

I have a dear friend who's not from around here, who spent many, many years raising a very large family, and she was heavily involved in home schooling, heavily involved in church activities, she ran Bible studies, she was a genuine student of the word, loved the Puritans. In fact she was the one who introduced Janice to the one-year Bible and the discipline of daily Bible study. She is now absolutely convinced that for the first 16 years of her Christian life, during all of that time that she was home schooling and doing Bible study and doing so much of this kingdom work, she is now convinced she was never a Christian. I mean she had the jargon down pat, she had the culture down pat, but she said she never had a childlike heart determined to walk in God's statutes and careful to obey his laws. She now believes that she became a Christian some 16 years after she thought she had committed her life to



Christ, and she's also convinced that she's not that unusual.

And so here's really where the dilemma lies. You see, Christians are not born again believers because they're baptized or joined a denomination or even because they behave in a certain way. A person becomes a Christian, person becomes "born again," if you will, only, only when the Holy Spirit takes up residence within them. It is the Spirit of God who moves us to follow his decrees and to keep his laws, and it is the Spirit alone who determines who will be his living temples. I mean Jesus said some amazing and troubling things about this in John 3. If you remember he's having this nighttime meeting with Nicodemus, he's the premiere teacher in all of Israel, and all of his godly learning and all of his behavior is amounting to nothing if he doesn't learn the most basic part of what it means to become a kingdom citizen and that's God explaining that it's his choice and not Nicodemus's. Listen to how Jesus put this. This is *John 3*. Nicodemus is completely flummoxed, he has no idea what is going on here. *Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Nicodemus said to him, *"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"* Jesus answered, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that*

*which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

You hear what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, he's telling, look, flesh gives birth to flesh but only God's Spirit can give birth to spirit, and God's Spirit moves in absolute sovereignty. *The wind blows where it wishes and it never asks permission. See, God is at work and he's at work building his kingdom and the marvelous thing is that we are his work. You know Ephesians 1 explains the who. It says this, it says: Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself, as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. And then Ephesians 2 explains the why. It says: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. I mean see what God is saying? He's saying the kingdom of God is made up of these fallen, sinful rebels who've been chosen by God as examples of his workmanship. Once again we see Romans 8:28 coming into play. God is telling us in Romans 8 that everything that is happening in your life is geared towards one grand purpose. And again, says: We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those*

*whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.* What God is saying is that everything that happens in the life of a kingdom citizen is geared towards making him uniquely into the image of God's own Son. You know the original term that pagans used for -- some pagans used for Christians was intended to be an insult, but it wound up perfectly describing God's intent. Early believers were called by some of the pagans in that pagan world "little Christs." That's precisely what God's intent is in the lives of his children. What God is doing is he is shaping uniquely each one of us into little Christs. And when the Spirit of God moves into our spirit, we begin our entrance into the kingdom of God. And from that moment on we operate not on our own power but on the power of the Holy Spirit. And again Paul explains it from *Romans 8*, he says this: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

Do you want a definition of a citizen of God's kingdom? Here's the definition of a kingdom citizen that transcends time and place and family and behavior or denomination. It is a profoundly simple definition. If you have the Spirit of Christ within you, you are Christian. If you don't, you are not. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. A citizen of the

kingdom is simply someone who has the Holy Spirit within him. And that covers a lot of territory. I mean look at Moses or David and Paul and Matthew, they all had the Spirit of God in them. And we look at these people and say, Moses and David, well they committed murder. Paul approved murder of a Christian no less. Matthew's a cheat and a fraud, a tax collector. They all became kingdom citizens and as they did, their lives became testimonies of God's workmanship. But you know for every one of them there were thousands that fell by the wayside, folks who thought they were part of the kingdom but were deceived.

And that leads to our third and most important question. How do I know if I'm a citizen of the kingdom? I mean the most hideous statement that could ever fall on human ears is that statement that was spoken of in Matthew by Jesus to those who had deceived themselves that they were kingdom citizens when they were not. Jesus said: *"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"* So how do I know, how do I know if I'm a kingdom citizen and not someone who's simply been self-deceived? Because if you raised your hand, if you said the sinner's prayer, if you even went to a Billy Graham rally, if you belong to a church, if you give your full tithe, you'd still be no match for the ones that Jesus rejected when he said this in *Matthew 7*. He said: *"Many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not*

*prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"*

The people hearing those words, they were flabbergasted. They thought they were top notch Christians. They were horribly mistaken and they were stunned. So how do I know I am not one of them? Well, first the first and most important step is to recognize the possibility of my own self-deception. I mean in our evangelical culture it's considered verboten to even entertain a thought like my friend did. She dared to consider the possibility that she might have been self-deceived, so she asked God to show her. And the more she honestly looked, the more God revealed to her the true state of her soul. And let me tell you, she too was flabbergasted. The difference is she was flabbergasted on this side of eternity where she could still do something about it. Sixteen years after she thought she had become a member of the kingdom she actually did. She was doing what God had been luring and enticing her the whole time, drawing her into. She was doing exactly what Paul insisted that we believers need to do in 2 *Corinthians 13*. This is what he says. He says: *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.* Okay. What's the test? Well, he gives us the answer to that in the very next sentence. He says: *Do you not realize this about*

*yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!* What he's saying here is if you're a member of the kingdom of God, you are for one reason, Christ is in you in the form of his Holy Spirit. *"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you."*

So what's the one question that we all have to ask ourselves?

Well, it's not about baptism, it's not about church membership, it's not even about Christian culture. It's nothing more simple than the question does the Spirit of Christ live within me? Have you ever asked yourself that question? The answer just requires a simple "yes" or "no." I mean there's really no pointing in any other direction, but let me tell you religion will point you at a hundred different directions, and it'll tell you that that question is immaterial. Religion will get you nowhere. Does the Spirit of Christ live within you? Are you controlled not by your sinful nature but by the Spirit that's resident within you? If God has put his Spirit in you then his Spirit is moving you to do as *Ezekiel 36* says, *to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.* Does that accurately describe your heart? See it's God's Spirit that gives us the will, the "willer", if you will, to obey him. Just consider Paul's opening paragraph. This is what he wrote to his church that was in exile. They were under intense persecution and he was writing them about the hallmark and what it

is that marks that very question that we're addressing, what is a believer. Listen to how he puts it. He's writing this letter. He says this: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with this blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.* I mean do you hear what Peter's saying here? He's saying as kingdom citizens you have been chosen, you have been equipped through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit for what? For obedience to Jesus Christ. *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* See, if you think you are washed in the blood, if you think you're saved and on your way to heaven and obedience is not at the core of your desire, then how do you know you're not kidding yourself? I mean it was Jesus who said that the gate is narrow that leads to eternal life and there's a four-lane highway going in the other direction. And we think he's speaking to the world, but Jesus wasn't speaking to the world, he was speaking to the church, a church that he claimed was filled with deceived unbelievers, folks that he referred to as weeds sown by an enemy. He said in *Matthew 13: "Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"*

So to redirect the question to another way, we have to ask ourselves am I wheat or am I weeds? And again we have to be aware of the flip side of that question. That doesn't mean you have to live lives of absolute perfection. Like I say every month, it doesn't mean that at all. It means that when you sin, you become aware of that sin. Why? Your willer's been replaced with something. What has it been replaced with? The Holy Spirit. And it's the Holy Spirit that convicts us. And so when we sin, we are aware that we've offended the Holy Spirit because why? He's living inside us. He's the one who is shaping and molding us into the very image of Jesus Christ. He's the Spirit within us that convicts us of sin and he's never, never ever going to let us get comfortable with it. And so if you are comfortable with it, you need to be very, very uncomfortable. It's the Spirit's job to make us fit for the kingdom and he never stops that work. We call it sanctification. It's being set apart for the Master's use.

And so we end by addressing the same questions: What is the kingdom of God? Well, it's the already/not yet. *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* What are kingdom citizens like? Well, they have a new Spirit within them that causes them to walk in God's statutes and be careful to obey his rules. And finally, how can we tell if we are citizens of the kingdom of God? Well we simply ask ourselves is the Spirit of Christ within us? Does *thy*



will be done mark our lives as it did our Savior's? Kingdom citizens welcome the kingdom's reality and they welcome it with obedience and with childlike trust. And because the Spirit of God now dwells within us, we too have the very same baseline realities that little Madeline did, because cats are soft and snow is cold, and Jesus is Lord. Let's pray.

*Father, I thank you for who you are. I thank you for how much you love us and how constantly you are surrounding us, encouraging us, warning us, showing us that your love is part and parcel of our lives. And if there's anyone in this room this morning, anyone who is hearing me by virtue of the You Tube channels or whatever, if you are bothered by this, you might say, hey, you've just given me a guilt trip and make me feel bad, well stop and back up a little bit, say the God who loves you is tweaking your conscience. The God who loves you will pursue you like he pursued my friend for sixteen years while she thought she was a Christian and she was not. If you have any thoughts about that, it's something that you can get squared away on your knees immediately. Just get before God, say, "Lord, if I've been self-deceived, peel that away, show it to me. Give me a heart that longs for your truth, as painful as it is. Give me a desire to trust in you, and to be obedient to you." God loves prayers like that. He loves to answer prayers like that. And you just may find yourself entering the kingdom the*

*first time. Jesus, I pray that you would give the grace, the strength, the power, and the wisdom for any and all who are seeking you that way. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*