

The Kingdom Belongs To...: Part 1

We have spent the last 7 weeks studying the descriptions of the Kingdom of God and we learned:

- The Kingdom of God will have no end, it is an eternal Kingdom.
- The citizens of the Kingdom are also eternal and will have no end.
- The Kingdom will be given to the true citizens of the Kingdom of God.
- For now it is an unseen Kingdom that lives within the souls of its citizens.
- It is not of this world.
- It cannot be shaken or moved.
- It is a Kingdom of ultimate power.
- It is a Kingdom that is marked by mercy, redemption, compassion, and forgiveness.
- This Kingdom is inside out and upside down when compared to human logic, reasoning, and wisdom.
- It is a kingdom of righteousness whose citizens are to be the righteousness of God.

Next we are going to study what the Bible says about those to whom the Kingdom belongs, which by definition gives us insight into those to whom it does not belong. In the same way that we need to understand what the Kingdom of God is like—its core attributes—we also need to understand the core attributes or defining characteristics of those to whom the Kingdom belongs. Remember, not

everyone who says “Lord, Lord” actually belongs in the Kingdom of God. Yet, this dichotomy between true Believers and unbelievers is a very complex and critical subject that, one-way-or-another, has a very profound impact on our lives. In fact, our weakness as humans, our tendency to want to embrace everyone who says they love God, and our cultural and religious ethic of personal goodness, makes it very difficult to separate out those who say they love God but actually don’t from those who do and are just struggling to be submitted to His will. It is all so complex.

But as we have learned there is a hardline of separation between those who belong to the Kingdom of God and those who belong to the kingdom of this world, for there is no middle or transient kingdom; by definition you belong to one or the other kingdom. It is a complete binary reality. Honestly, we may not always be able to see or discern the difference between the two, but in the eyes of God and the eyes of the enemy, the demarcation is absolute and uncompromising. You are either a child of the light, and this light shines forth into the darkness; or you have no light and are filled with darkness, only convinced you are of the light. “And if the light that you think you have is really darkness, how deep that darkness is” (**Matthew 6:23**). That is why the Lord says in **Isaiah 50:11**. “But watch out, you who live in your own light (your own goodness and delusions of godliness) and warm yourselves by your own fires (or your own standard of what it means to be a Believer versus God’s standard). This is the reward you will receive from me: You will soon fall down in great torment.” That is a harrowing warning for those who love their religious goodness and a reality check for those of us who don’t know how to discern the difference.

One’s citizenship in the Kingdom of God is not based on knowing or saying the

right words, nor is it based on a certain set of actions and behaviors—or hanging out in the right communities or circle of friends. Often, those who belong to the kingdom of this world sound like true Believers. They know the right words to say, how to act like true Believers, and they follow the prescription of expectations given to them in their various religious communities. They are even found hanging out in the circles of true Believers, which it makes it very hard to know who is who. After all, there are those who are wolves and yet have adorned themselves in sheep clothing. They want to devour the sheep from within the safety of their own fold (**Matthew 7:15**). We also know the enemy has placed tares among the wheat, those who look like true Believers but upon maturity never truly bear the fruit of the Spirit (**Matthew 13:24-30**). It can all be so confusing.

Yet, God has spoken many words defining those who truly belong to Him and those who don't because He wants us to have the wisdom to know the difference. Why? Because it actually matters. I believe this is in part for our protection, but also because Jehovah Mekoddishkem has sanctified you, or set you apart from all others. His goal is to circumcise you from this world, free you from all its entanglements and He does not want you to try and rejoin what He has chosen to divide. Let's look at what He says about this:

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are

the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE." Therefore, "COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAR; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," says the Lord Almighty.

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers" is rendered in the *present middle imperative*. Being an *imperative*, we know it is a command the Lord wants us to obey; it also applies to every moment of our now (the *present tense*); and being in the *middle voice*, we must dig down deep in our soul and make this very unpopular decision. This undoubtedly implies that we need to have the wisdom to know the difference between who is a believer and who is not. For most people, obeying this command is not really all that difficult when it comes to dealing with people who are obviously given over to the world and all its sickness. What is difficult, and where we need the wisdom of God, is to discern between those are the real deal and those who look like, act like, and talk like true Believers, but are not.

You see it does not matter what a person says or does, they can even proclaim over and over: "Lord, Lord" and do all sorts of "good" things "for" God, but if they are not a true Believer, we are commanded to be separate from them: "COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE;" "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAR." This obviously does not mean we don't engage or have anything to do with them; after all, they would never know the truth about Jesus if they don't observe the truth in our lives. Rather, it means we are not to be relationally yoked

or committed to them. In the Greek, this phrase “bound together” uses the imagery of two different animals being yoked up together to plow a field. Those who do such things for a living (plowing fields) will tell you that an unequal yoking does not work and the field will be a mess. So God commands us to not be relationally bound to unbelievers because our field will be a disaster. Out in the world (school and work) this type of separation tends to be less disruptive, but what about when it comes to those in the church? What about with those in our families and our friends who say they believe? You must not ignore this; it is a command. Your intimacy, your dependency, and the connections to your identity are to be with those similarly separated by God—not those who abide in this world.

Now the way God describes our obedience to this command is really fascinating and it involves, as always, both our choice and His action. Let’s look at verse **6:17**, “Therefore, ‘COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,’ says the Lord. ‘AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; and I will welcome you.’” “Come out” is in the *aoi*st active imperative. Thus, it is a command (the *imperative*), but it is to be our way of life from beginning to end (hence, the *aoi*st tense). We are to always live as one who goes forth out of the midst of unbelievers wherever they may be found. In other words, we are never to be found bound to unbelievers in intimacy and dependency. And the Lord does not make any exceptions, He states it as a command that is to be obeyed.

And when it says “be separate” it is rendered in the *aoi*st passive imperative. Once again we have a command which also deals with how we live as a matter of lifestyle. Being in the *aoi*st tense, we are to always be separate. However, being in the *passive* voice, it means that God is the one who separates us. Hence, this is a

command to live out our spiritual reality. He has separated us, that is what Jehovah Mekoddishkem has done; and we are commanded, from beginning to end, to live as one who is separated by God. This is why He commands us in **2 Timothy 2:22** (which we studied extensively in part **42 of Faith, Hope, & Love**) to now pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. It is a very limiting command which few have the courage to follow.

“Do not touch what is unclean” utilizes the *present middle imperative*. This command (*imperative*) is for every moment of our now (*present* tense). We are not to touch, or literally attach ourselves, to that which is unclean (which is a Biblical euphemism for an unbeliever). And being in the *middle* voice, this is a decision that we must dig down deep in our soul and make; no one will make it for us. However, if we chose to obey, God says that He will make the decision to receive us, or to take us into His favor, and that is a statement of fact (it is rendered in the *future middle indicative*). In other words, He promises to bless us.

The implications of this passage are radical; therefore, it is critical that we are able to discern this issue of who is and who is not a believer when it comes to those to whom we would normally “attach” ourselves in relationship. Think about the possible repercussions; it is scary. You will be called judgmental, exclusive, and probably be looked upon as a threat. No matter how you try to explain it they will not have ears to hear or eyes to see; they are blinded by the religion of this world. With that in mind, I know this sounds so contrary to how we have been told to live in terms of not being judgmental of others, but honestly that is just religious talk and a misunderstanding of **Matthew 7**, which deals with the hypocrisy of religious judgment not judgment in-and-of itself. Tell me how can you obey this command if

you do not know the difference? You simply must judge; however, according to **Matthew 7:2** you must judge with the standard by which you will be judged, which we will get to in a moment.

With that said, in the day-in-and-day-out activities of life, I believe it is very difficult to always know one way or the other who is and who is not truly a believer. Again, we are easily deceived by our own personal and cultural weakness as well as the nature of the struggle to learn how to live from the Spirit and not from the *flesh*. But the good news is that overtime the fruit will always reveal the truth, and the fruit does not lie (**Matthew 7:20**). You just have to be willing to look and honestly deal with the fruit that is produced from a person's life, understand the difference between the fruit of the Spirit, or the things which the Spirit produces and becomes evident in and through a life in which He indwells, and the fruit—especially the religious fruit—that is produced from a person's *flesh* (see **Galatians 5:19-23**). And if, over time, a person's life does not bring forth the evidence of the Spirit, then you must be willing to dig down deep in your soul and make the choice to obey God and come out from them regardless of the cost to your personally.

I want us to look at a very difficult passage tonight in **Matthew 7** which addresses this whole issue of those who belong to the Kingdom and those who don't but seem like they do, based on what they say, how they act, the good deeds they do, and so on. Tonight we will cover **7:13-20** and next week we will cover **21-27**.

Matthew 7:13-27

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that

leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS."

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell — and great was its fall.

Before we jump into the first statement about the gate, I must give you a little background on **Matthew 7**. This passage is part of a continuing narrative that

started in **Matthew 5** and is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. According to **Matthew 4:24**, large crowds were following Jesus from Galilee, the 10 largely Gentile cities east of the Sea of Galilee (called the Decapolis), Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan to the East. When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain and He sat down, His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach. His entire sermon is about the contrived religious system of the Jews, which was premised on a false sense of righteousness, or the presumption that we can be good like God. Jesus purposed to show the hypocrisy of this system; hence, such statements as, “everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” and “whoever says “you fool” to a brother shall be guilty enough to go into the fires of hell.” His overall point can be summarized in the statement: “**Only God is good.**” Therefore, don’t think you can be good enough for God by what you do and what you say, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Besides, God’s standard is not good intentions, but perfection. **Matthew 5:48**: Therefore, you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The first statement in **7:13-14** about the narrow gate falls into this same line of thinking. And remember, Jesus is talking to the religious person who thinks they are good and thinks they are living in the way of righteousness. He therefore says, “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” “Enter through” is in the *arist active imperative*. It starts with a command and being in the *arist* tense it is to be how we live as a matter of lifestyle. We are to always be found entering through the narrow gate because the alternative leads to ruin or loss. And

just so you know, Jesus is that gate; it is similar to the reference of Him being the door in **John 10:2**.

The other option is to enter through the broad gate through which many can fit; and since the path is wide, it accommodates great crowds. The multitudes are now on that path, and that is a statement of fact (it is rendered in the *present active indicative*). In the “now” of every time period that has ever been, the masses have chosen this road; no one has forced them. The phrase “enter through it” is rendered in the *present middle participle*. In their now they dug down deep in their soul and chose the wide path; and they now continue to choose (it’s a *participle*) to go down this road to ruin and loss. It makes sense, it seems like the easier road.

This next phrase is quite fascinating, however, the translation is horrific. People choose the broad road because the gate is narrow (technically it’s not small, just narrow so you can’t crowd through it) and the way is tribulation. The Greek word “*tethlimmene*” is a verb not an adjective. Thus, it is not describing the way (as in being “narrow”), but it is defining how the way operates. This word is used 10 times in the New Testament and with the exception of this one instance, it is translated 9 other times as afflicted, trouble, tribulation, and it is even used to refer to a crowd of people that might overrun you or throng you by squishing you leaving you nowhere to go. People choose the wide gate and the broad road because the road to life is through a very narrow gate and it is filled with affliction and crushing.

This word “*tethlimmene*” is built on the root word “*thilbo*” which means to press, rub, crush, and push. Here it is rendered in the *perfect passive participle*. The *perfect* tense means God has determined it and there is no changing His perfect plan; the *passive* voice indicates that God is the one who does it—He brings the

trouble into our lives; and the *participle* means He continues to do it. Hence, the statement in **Acts 14:22**, “Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God.” The way of tribulation is part and parcel to the life of a true Believer. After all, the Spirit declares, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (**2 Timothy 3:12**).

I know that most people did not read the fine print before they prayed the “sinner’s prayer,” and this explains why so few people actually stay on this narrow road. Once they encounter trouble and great affliction they find the broad path to be much more pleasant and safe. Besides, everyone else seems to be on that road. All they have to do is look around and they find that they have plenty of company on that road in terms of friends, family, church members, and so on. Yes, the road of religion and personal goodness is so safe when it comes to people, it is just so unsafe when it comes to God and to actually experiencing true life. The inverse is true as well. The narrow road of faith is so unsafe when it comes to people, it is just so safe when it comes to God and to actually experiencing true life.

This narrow road of trouble and affliction leads to life; and since “leads” is in the *present active participle*, you will experience life now and continually as long as you are on that road. It is a strange oxymoron. The road that requires death is in fact the road of life. The road that lets you live, however, is the road of destruction. It is all so fascinating. You got to die to live and, as we know, you have to live to love.

Let’s look at this final statement of this first phrase, “and there are few who find it.” The phrase “there are few” is in the *present active indicative*. So every moment of your now (and all the moments of “now” in the past) there are few—or literally, the number is puny; and being in the *indicative* that is a statement of fact. And that

is because this is a road of faith where one must actively believe the truth, or said another way, where one must bet their life on all that God says He is and all that He says they are, regardless of what is going on in their life. Thus, only those who abide in faith walk on this road.

Accordingly, few find it. This is rendered in the *present active participle*. In other words, many may stumble on to the road, but once they encounter the troubles and affliction they don't continue on the road (hence, the *participle*). Very few, a puny number of people, find this road and choose to continue over and over again to live on this road despite the pain and rejection they experience that will largely come at the hands of the religious community who are convinced they are offering service to God by persecuting them (**John 16:2**). A similar reference is made in **Luke 13:24** where Jesus says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." Again, the gate is narrow, few find it.

So this passage lays the ground work for the rest of what Jesus is going to say. He has divided His audience of religious people into two groups: those who enter through the narrow gate and are on the road of trouble, and those who enter through the broad gate and are on the wide road of destruction. Given His audience, Jesus essentially said that their wanting to be right with God, wanting to do right for God, and all their great professions of allegiance to God are in fact meaningless to God. After all, intentions are for ... well, let's just say they don't matter. All that matters is whether or not you are on the right road—the narrow road of trouble, which is the road of faith that so few enter upon. Then He continues in **7:15**: "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

This is scary. There are people who are religious imposters that look, act, and talk like they believe, but they are actually evil. They are ravenous wolves that just want to destroy true Believers. Honestly, I don't know if they are even cognizant of what they do; they are just so surrendered to darkness that they emulate the ways of the enemy. They infiltrate communities of Believers under the guise of godliness and therein begin to ravage the weak and the young. On the outside, based on behavior alone, you can't really be sure who is a wolf and who is not, for they look like sheep who have problems and difficulties just like any true Believer. So how do we know the difference?

“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.” Clearly you are going to have to judge if you are going to obey Jesus' command to “Beware of the false prophets.” So much for the idea that we are not to judge others. Now, what we tend to get tripped up by is “behavior,” but we must understand that behavior is not the same thing as fruit. Behavior is always confusing. After all, Jesus tore up the Temple, threw over tables, took whips and scattered the people. He cut the religious leaders to the core sparing them no shame in the presence of their followers. So behavior in-and-of itself is no indication of fruits—good or bad. Besides, even true Believers often function from their *flesh* and produce “deeds” of the *flesh*.

Think about fruit. It does not suddenly pop out of a tree or a vine. It slowly grows.

Thus, you often cannot be sure of it until the end of the season; but eventually, at the time of maturity, it becomes clear. Even then, unless you are familiar with that specific type of fruit, you cannot really be sure if it is good for you. Thus, the Bible gives us a description of the fruit of the Spirit so we might learn how to identify His fruit separate and distinct from all that is not from the Spirit—including great religious acts and deeds.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...

The most obvious observation is that this fruit is not produced from trying to do “good” or be “good” for God, but it is naturally produced from the Spirit of God as He lives in you. This fruit is part of Him; you just become a vessel through which it is experienced. We are also talking about the fruit not fruits of the Spirit—in the Greek it is singular and not plural. Therefore, we can conclude that love is the fruit of the Spirit and this love is described through such attributes as joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And since “love” is the Greek word “*agape*” we know that this speaks of a love that is divine and belongs exclusively to God; after all God is love. You cannot *agape* love, you can only be a vessel through which He exits and thereby loves.

Thus, the only way this fruit can be identified in your life is if Jesus, through the Spirit of God, possesses you, is in control of your life, and is free to live through you.

And since we know that in order to love you must live and in order to live you must die, you must enter the narrow gate and traverse the road of trouble and affliction. This is why ***Galatians 5:24*** finishes this thought with this statement: “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” They have put to death and laid aside that which is not God.

So how do you tell the difference between a true Believer and a religious poser? To start, if they have willingly walked the pathway of death and surrendered, or are in the process of surrendering, their fear, idolatry, shame, self-love, pride, and are putting to death the dysfunctional coping mechanism they have used in an attempt to control their lives and limit their pain. If a person is not on this path, or if they come and go from this path, then you know to beware regardless of their deeds and confessions. Further, unless divine love, in all its manifestations and forms, comes through their body, you know to beware.

And how will you know. It is easy. Do they have peace of mind and peace of body? Do they live in joy? Do you experience patience and kindness? What about goodness. We know that only God is good, therefore, do you actually experience God within that person? What about gentleness and self-control. Don't be confused, self-control is not the type of control people wield in their lives in an attempt to not sin; that never lasts. Self-control is the ability to put off one's own wants, rights, needs, and desires for the sake of others, considering others as more important than oneself. If you are honest, this is a very difficult list; but, if you are honest, I believe that over time you will be able to discern who is and who is not truly of the faith and therefore to whom you should and should not be bound.

You will know them by their fruits. A good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree

bears bad fruit. Every tree that does not now and continually bear good fruit (*present active participle*) is now cut down by God, and that is a statement of fact (*present passive indicative*), and is now cast into the fire by God, and that is also a statement of fact (*present passive indicative*). In other words, a religious poser cannot produce the fruit of *agape* love; it is impossible. Similarly, your *flesh* cannot produce the fruit of love; it is impossible. But God goes after every tree that does not bear fruit and He cuts, He prunes, He tears down, and in the now burns the worthless branches up in the fire (which is why the road of faith is so painful). For those who have the Spirit, the result is God and with the bad tree cut down, He will produce His fruit of love. But for those who have not the Spirit, the result is destruction, ruin, and loss—after all, it is the way of the wide path.

There is a distinction between true Believers and unbelievers who say they believe. Behavior is not the distinguishing mark, especially when God is busy cutting and pruning and burning. In those times, the behavior of True Believers may even look worse than unbelievers; after all, they tend to be in massive pain as God puts down their *flesh*. But over time the distinction is made clear. As a true Believer dies to their *flesh*, they are able to consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. And before long you will start to actually experience Jesus in and through their lives. And His mark of love is absolutely recognizable; it is peaceful, joyful, full of self-control, and so on.

If you hang around a person long enough it becomes apparent which road they are on and which gate they entered through, despite what they might say or do. Those on the wide road constantly try to get God to conform to their will instead of their conforming to His will. Maybe not in words but in deed and in practice they

say, “Lord, please, please let my will be done.” Their focus is always on this life and what they think their life should be. Whereas, the gate is narrow and road is filled with trouble and tribulation that leads to life; and few find it—very few. But those who are on the road of life seek His will, whether they like it or not, and they allow God to circumcise them from this world. It may take a while, but over time it is clear that they have traversed down the road of tribulation. Thus, if you find yourself in the throng of people who are just living life but are doing church and Christianity to appease their conscience and to be “good” with God, beware. You just might be on the wrong road.

I have one final “beware” for you to consider in terms of knowing who is and who is not on the road to life. If you have been traveling down the wide road and stop and choose to walk through the narrow gate, you will, by definition, be on a different road that goes in different directions and has different outcomes. These roads are not parallel at all; so there will be separation, it is natural. Therefore, those with whom you used to travel will not be happy about you choosing a different road and believe me they will not be silent. They will want you to come back. But this is why the road to life is a pathway of faith. It does not matter what man thinks, it does not matter what man says, it does not even matter what man does; it only matters what God has said.

We will stop here for now and pick back up in **7:21** next week.

Let's Pray.