

## The Kingdom Belongs To...: Part 5

Let's review quickly what we have learned so far in terms of those to whom the Kingdom belongs. The Kingdom of God belongs to those who **do the will of the Father**; in fact, Jesus identifies His family by those who now and continually do the will of the Father. Another descriptor we studied is that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who **live by faith**. These are those who now and continually **behold** the Son of God for who He is (the Lord God Almighty) and who now and continually **believe** in the Son by betting their lives on the fact that He is the Lord God Almighty. And to no surprise, this is the will of the Father: to behold and believe (**John 6:40**). These concepts are interchangeable. I want you to remember, however, that faith is not merely an intellectual or even emotional agreement with the truth; rather, it is about considering the full ramifications of the truth and, as I said, betting your lives on it.

What does it practically mean to you and for you that Jesus is the Lord? How does that frame your past, present and future? Have you truly settled with what He had to do in your life? What does it practically mean to you and for you that Jesus is God? What does it practically mean to you and for you that Jesus is the Almighty? Do these questions circulate in your mind providing you tools by which you can assess the issues of your life? Do they engage your emotions, do they alter how you see this physical world? True Biblical faith requires the practical application of the truth that Jesus, and only Jesus, is the Lord God Almighty.

Thus, to drive home this issue of true Biblical faith, I want to talk about applying our faith in a very practical way in regards to our relationships in this body. I have

noticed something that has disturbed me for some time and it seems like more and more I am seeing it everywhere I look. My intention is that this discussion will help us work through this issue through the framework of faith—understanding and believing that Jesus is the Lord God Almighty. In so doing, it will provide for us a tutorial of how we can approach all the issues in our life which limit or restrict our intimacy with Christ and with one another. It will also give us an example of how we are to practically let the Word of God transform how we think, how we feel, and the choices we make with regards to one another.

To frame this issue, let's return to **1 John 3:14** which says, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we now {*agape*} **love** the brethren. He who does not now love and continue to love abides in death." As we have learned, God's divine *agape* love expressed from our lives is the ultimate proof that we have walked through and continually walk through the narrow gate of faith mentioned in **Matthew 7:13-14**. And we know that *agape* love is an attribute of Jesus' own character and nature; after all, God is love (**1 John 4:8**). Therefore, *agape* love is not something He gives us, like a spiritual gift, but it comes with His personhood. Accordingly, *agape* love is not of man and cannot be produced by anything we do. All we can do is allow Jesus to so possess and dominate our being that He is able to love others in and through our lives. In other words, as we, by faith, set aside our *flesh* with all its sick, selfish, and gross demands and allow Jesus to rule over our mind, our body, and our emotions, we will become a vessel for His love. Christ in us will love through us. We have learned this and we all know this.

But how can we love with His divine love if we have such a hard time being friends? Look, I know that we all really enjoy each other and have substantial

relationships—better than we have ever experienced in our lives—it is truly amazing. However I also see a darkness that resides deep within our souls which impacts every one of our relationships and curtails our ability to enjoy the depth of intimacy that I know God wants us to experience both as a vessel through which His love flows and as a recipient which gets to drink deep of His love through others. This darkness is like a shadow; it loves to stay hidden and move to and fro to keep from being identified.

God first brought this issue up in my life a few years ago, back in 2011; and He brought about my release in January of this year when I went to the Assembly. Until recently, I thought I just had the problem and did not think about the way this darkness impacts everyone. Silly me; one day I will learn that God tends to deal with me as a precursor to dealing with the body. When God first brought this to my attention, He imaged this darkness within me as a black flower. I did not know what to make of it at the time, but eventually I realized the black flower was a representation of this deep seemingly insatiable need to find proof, in practically every relationship (and every interaction for that matter), that I am wanted and worthy of being loved and considered. It was like this secret quest that was always in operation. It's as if this black flower represented this sick desire we all have residing so deeply within our souls to be constantly validated in some way, shape, or form, because at the core we are so insecure as people. It is the evidence that we have not yet truly found our identity in being a citizen of the Kingdom of God and are still trying to find the ultimate form of acceptance in this world; hence, it is the evidence that we have not yet truly embraced the love of God.

At first when God brought it up I did not understand what in the world He was

getting at. Then sometime last year in the fall or winter, Sarah brought it to my attention. She said that she could not pin it down but that something was just not right in how she saw me interacting with others. Of course, everything in me wanted to argue and defend myself, but then I remembered—in the moment—that I no longer need to self-protect and told myself she was not attacking me but attempting to help me. This was in-and-of-itself quite a victory for me. It was a practical way I had to walk by faith and apply the truth I have learned and bet my life on it. So I said I would start to pray about it. I meant it too, not in the “I will pray about it” way to get someone off your back, but for real. Honestly, I knew she was right. I knew something was wrong, but I had no way to grasp it or sort it out. But as I began to pray, very quickly, I began to see what she was talking about; and I did not like it. What I saw was embarrassing and I am humiliated that I am going to talk about it; so please take it easy on me.

I began to see this black flower so clearly and started to understand how it surreptitiously influenced me in practically all my relationships driving me to reach out for validation in order to stabilize something inside of me. This was weird to me because I have always considered myself a pretty confident person and not overly needy. Yet, in certain situations (usually with people outside of this body), I became aware of this craving to sneak into conversation something about my education or business experience. I clearly wanted to impact or influence the way a person thought about me. In other situations, I was dying to talk about my athletic achievements, as small as they may be. I just wanted some comparative validation so I would throw in the mix something about fight club. It impacted how I interacted with women. I could see myself, almost as if I was having an out-of-body

experience, talk to them, look at them, or touch them in a certain way to get even the smallest of reactions confirming that I was wanted and worthy of being loved. With guys, I noticed I would want to be smart and be able to add value to a conversation in order to get a glimpse of approval. I mean the actual examples of this type of behavior flowing from my life is endless and horrifying; and what I am hoping right now is that you are less thinking about how I have behaved and humiliated myself and more how this has played out in your life (ha). The insane thing is that so much of this behavior can be played off as normal conversation, innocent flirting, or just typical guy-banter. And to some extent that may be, but God was showing me that for me it was rooted in darkness and revealed a hole in my soul that He did not yet fill.

I also realized that this need to prove that I am wanted and worthy of being loved was insatiable; it was never satisfied. If I got that certain reaction, big or small, it did not fill the hole nor did it bring contentment or convince me that I am actually wanted and loved. The satisfaction was fleeting and I would have to reinforce the experience over and over again; it became an addiction. The interesting thing to me was how it was so automatic and “natural.” For far too long I was mostly unaware of what I was doing and why I was doing it. Looking back, I guess I can say that I was not as unaware as I would like for you to believe, but it was not tangible and could not be pinned down enough to do something about until God codified it in an image, the black flower.

Once I could see this black flower, I started to ask God to show me how deep this need to prove that I am wanted really goes; and it was deep. I realized that there was something about me and God that was missing. The behavior was just the fruit;

clearly I had not settled in His love. Obviously, I believed at some level that His love alone was not enough to satisfy me and I needed more. Yet, David said in ***Psalm 63:3, 5*** that the Lord's love was better than life and that his soul was satisfied as with marrow and fatness. Did I believe that? Was I willing to bet my life on this truth? Would I choose to believe that His love would satisfy to that extent of deliciousness? In ***Psalm 103:5*** He says that He satisfies our desire with good things so that our youth is renewed like the eagle. ***Psalm 107:9*** says that He satisfies the thirsty soul. ***Matthew 5:6*** says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." ***Ephesians 3:19*** mentions that we can know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now all of that is amazing; we can be satisfied. His love can fill us up to the fullness of God. How is that even possible? That is pretty darn full. These are scriptures we tend read over and think are special, but since we can't fathom it for our lives we really don't give it much mind. Clearly, I did not believe that Jesus can actually satisfy me so completely and so thoroughly that I did not need to selfishly take from others in this underhanded way? My faith was lacking and God wanted me to actively believe the truth of how full and complete His love was for me. He wanted me to believe, by faith, that He can fill me up and satisfy me—even up to the fullness of God.

This became the crux of my battle. I started to become so aware of this in me that in every interaction I could clearly see the black flower. I began to recognize my desire to reach out in some way to get that "something" back, no matter how small that something might be. I realized how selfish I was, for at the core of my being I was just taking. This was not love at all; at least not His *agape* love. Sure

everything I did was wrapped up in Jesus and what He has called me to do in terms of loving and giving myself to this body, but it was still corrupted as there were these places where I was taking from this body. I hated what I had seen, and I prayed over and over for God to enable me to conquer this sickness. I found that I was able—in the moment—to choose different behaviors, but still this war waged in my soul.

Was God enough? I had to ask myself, can God actually bring satisfaction? Can He quiet my soul? In **Psalm 46:10** He says, “Let go, relax, or cease from striving, and know that I am God.” Then I realized that this sickness was not a result of anything God has failed to do, but it was a result of what I was unwilling to do. I first had to admit that I was unwilling to let go of my cry for constant validation and proof that I am wanted and loved. Second, I had to choose to lay it aside and trust that He is God, my God, who has loved me with an everlasting love (**Jeremiah 31:3**). And if He is God and He is the Almighty, then by definition He is big enough, vast enough, and powerful enough to satisfy even the deepest longing in my soul.

As I have looked around this body, I see this black flower everywhere. As I said, it is like a black shadow that moves and floats around to keep us from truly being aware of its surreptitious and destructive activity. The impact of this black flower is great and if we don't challenge this, collectively as a body, over time it will completely corrupt what God is doing here. We will love, we will be friends, but it will not be a pure expression of His divine *agape* love; which, as we know, is all that really matters. Remember, **Galatians 5:6** says that none of our attempts to do good and do it right mean anything at all, but only faith working through love. Thus, His love in and through our lives is the only thing that truly matters. His love is the

ultimate proof that we have entered and continue to enter the narrow gate; accordingly, we must be willing to throw off everything and anything that gets in the way of our knowing and experiencing the depth of His love and from becoming a pure vessel of His love.

I have witnessed how difficult it is for you to be the kind of friends that truly experience a deep and ongoing intimacy which establishes a platform for God's *agape* love to be shared. When you try and be friends, this black flower gets in the way and always messes things up. I will explain what I have seen and hopefully it will poke deep enough inside of you such that this message is able engage your black flower and begin to wage war against it.

Between guys and girls, that innocent flirting and exchange of subtle sensuality keeps you from even getting to know the other person because you are so fixated on you: what you are getting; what you want from that person; and what you think it means for you. And even if the other person flirts in return, it is never enough. I see you constantly try and get the other person to prove that you are actually wanted and worthy of love; and that desire corrupts everything. I don't believe you really like that person you are flirting with anyways. How could you? You don't even really know them; you just love the idea of it all and what it means for you. Getting this type of validation is like a drug or an addiction. Many of the dating relationships were established on this sickness; and it is obvious from the fruit that has been produced.

I have also noticed the way some of you sit back and literally demand that others take care of you. And unless they take the lead and care for you, however you define that and whatever rules you apply, you refuse to give yourself to them.



Instead, you complain, have talks, and make them the issue instead of your selfish neediness. Some of this dynamic is amplified by the male/female fantasy where the woman wants a man to come in and sweep her off her feet and the man wants to ride in on his horse to find his woman just waiting for him thinking of nothing but giving herself to him. It is all so ridiculous; but those fantasies have developed out of this deep unfulfilled need to know with all certainty we are always wanted and always loved.

I have seen people try so hard to be “smart,” “funny,” or “witty” as a way to get the response they desire. They think if they are smart enough, funny enough, or witty enough that others will finally want them. Then there are those who have thrown in the towel believing no one is ever going to give them the validation they desire and deserve; no one is going to truly want them and love them. Therefore, they act as if they are above needing anyone for real and they turn inward to be their own source of self-validation and approval. Often it comes across as if they really don't care (and that tends to be how they treat people); so they ease their conscience by substituting “hanging out” and “doing things” with people for true intimacy. Still others are always trying to be the person who will serve, help out, or “be there” for someone when they are hurting. It is sick, disingenuous, and ultimately so, so selfish.

This need to be wanted is insatiable. No matter how much validation a person receives it is never enough. They just seem to get better and craftier at finding ways to obtain it. In fact, the black flower drives people to an obsession with getting, and getting, and getting; and it comes out in all manner of neediness. For most of us, the art of neediness is in its subtlety; in other words, we don't want others to know

what is really going on. But for others, you have said, “Screw the art of it all,” and you let this neediness and desire for validation drip off of you as you essentially beg for others to come and care for you. It’s bad; and it is such a relational obstruction. I wish you could understand.

When you are bent on proving that you are worthy of love and acceptance—even if it is just proving it to yourself—it reveals a deep distrust of God and obviously a deep distrust of others. That is why you cannot rest in the love you have received and your satisfaction and contentment is so temporary. You can hear that you are loved and wanted, people can prove you are loved and wanted, you can even get that little response you so desperately want to get from that special someone, but it is never enough to satisfy and quiet your soul. And for those in relationships, and even marriage, I know you have learned that your significant other cannot affirm you enough to stabilize your soul in this regard. We must wake up and smell the roses, romance is not the salve that calms the soul; in fact, it usually just agitates it. I know we all still think it is the panacea of life and hope I am talking about others and not you; but remember, since you have been chosen, God will not allow you to elevate anything or anyone in your life above His desire that you become like Him. So don’t bet your soul on romance being the answer.

We must all face the truth that when it comes down to it, we do not believe that God is enough or that God in and through others will ever be enough. You do not believe that He can truly satisfy you in this life; so you demand for more and more and more and more validation and you take and take and take and take all you can get. This is why it is so hard to have the kind of intimate friendships that allow for a free flow of God’s *agape* love. We are all way too selfish. This distrust of God and

our unwillingness to believe His love can satisfy is at the core of our sickness. Only His love can remove the black flower; but we always want Him to just do it for us, to satisfy us, and then we will “believe.” We don’t want it to be an issue of faith whereby we work through our wrong belief and unbelief to finally realize that He has already done the work and we have just not received it.

For example, in this regard, I think few believers have truly accepted the full implication of the cross. Yeah, we know He died for our sins. But even then we are so disconnected from the actual consequence of sin and its penalty (both temporal and eternal) that much of its import is lost on us. We kind of get it, but still it does not translate into our being once-and-for-all convinced that we are loved and wanted. Yet, when we hated God and wanted nothing to do with Him, He chose to give up His life in order that we might have life. We still don’t understand; this is how dull we are. In the same way, I think few believers have truly accepted the full implication of the incarnation. Yeah, we have accepted the fact that Jesus became a man, but we gloss over the impact of that reality. God, the creator of the universe, condescended Himself and set aside the glory of the divine and cloaked Himself in the flesh of humanity. What He did was unfathomable. That is why the Bible says that eye has not seen nor ear has heard and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him (**1 Corinthians 2:9**, loosely citing **Isaiah 64:4** as well as other apocryphal writings). In context, it refers to God becoming a man.

Often I think about what it would have been like if the disciples would have really understood that the man they were hanging around with created everything—even the food they were enjoying. Imagine, all they saw and touched, from the dirt on the ground to the galaxies of the heavens, were being held together, at that very

moment, by Him. Just think of all the questions you would have asked Jesus. Perhaps you would ask Him why He did it. As God, He could have just forgiven the sins of those who are chosen. He could have just healed those who needed to be healed and raised from the dead those who needed to be raised from the dead. He could have just done the miracles without ever leaving heaven or becoming flesh. Why did He choose to become a man?

The book of *Hebrews* (2:18; 4:15) makes it all very personal. It tells us that He was tempted like us in all that He suffered as a man. This means in His pain He was tempted to reach out and get the validation and affirmation that every person wants; after all, He was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. But instead of selfishly taking, He chose to trust Himself to the One able to save Him. He believed the Father would satisfy. In fact, we are told He learned obedience—or learned to trust—from the things He suffered. In other words, God sent His Son to this world to suffer as a man and die as a man so we would know that He knows our pain, our agony, and the things that torment our soul. He wanted us to know this truth not just in some “God is omniscient” way, but in a man way, so we would know and be convinced that He knows. After all, He lived it; every bit of it. Thus, He knows what we need and He knows how to satisfy us completely.

I also want you to keep in mind how badly God wanted you. According to *Ephesians 1:5-13*, in love, He has been manipulating time and space for centuries to order all the affairs of humanity to ensure that you would come to Him. He likens it to the redemption of His possession; to purchase back what belongs to Him. He even calls you His precious possession (*1 Peter 2:9*). It is amazing. He loved you from before time, which is why His love for you is an everlasting love. All that we

want, that desperate craving to be considered, wanted, chosen, and loved, all the time without end, has been satisfied in Him; we just need to believe and be open to receive it. This means you must first stop trying to take.

When I started to wrestle with this truth, in addition to feeling really gross about all that I saw, I felt so vulnerable. I knew God wanted me to risk letting go so that I might know that He is God—my God. He wanted me to stop striving to be ok. He wanted me to stop taking and to stop relishing in those fleeting moments of validation. He wanted me to realize that I am ok because He has wanted me always and has loved me beyond anything I could fathom. He wanted me to choose to believe that He has considered me and knows, both as a man and as God, what it will take to quiet my soul and satisfy me. He wanted me to give up my affirmation addiction. He wanted me to choose to trust that if I do not take matters into my own hands and take what I think I need, He would be real enough and tangible enough to satisfy me completely.

It was all so scary; but He had set a path in front of me and I knew I could not look back, I had to press on. And so I did. As He made my choice to choose Him so tangible, and I in turn chose to disregard the yearnings of my addiction and trust that He would be real to me, that vulnerability turned to security and comfort. It was weird. Instead of my normal feelings of loneliness and desire, I was suddenly ok. I could go home, go to bed, and not be sad or dismayed about what I did not have. I started to sleep great. The wanting quieted down to nothing more than a small whisper. I was amazed. I was legitimately ok! After years and years of yearning, I not only felt wanted and loved, I knew I was wanted and loved. And here is the thing, I felt that in the very relationships in which I had been desperately

seeking to be wanted and loved. It was not just a “me” and God thing, it was a “we” and God thing. I experienced this satisfaction and contentment through the relationships here in this body. Who would have thought? It was there all the time. I was just blinded and crippled by this hole in my soul and it prevented me from feasting on the amazing banquet which God had prepared.

This has freed me to genuinely care for people, to be their friend, to experience intimacy, and to love them with God’s *agape* love and it not be polluted by my neediness. And it is sweet and satisfying to give and not always be taking; it truly steadies the soul. At times I have seen that little whisper try and get my attention and make me worry that I am somehow going without, but now that it has been unmasked and I know the vile and selfish nature of its darkness, I never want to indulge that sickness ever again. I love being a vessel through which Jesus can love; it blows my mind that He is so real and so able to satisfy.

**Matthew 5:3** says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” **Matthew 5:6** says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be **satisfied**” (or literally gorged). I believe these two notions are intricately tied together. **Matthew 5:3** is essentially a statement of fact (it is rendered in the *present active indicative*). In other words, the kingdom belongs to those who are poor in spirit; and they are happy and that is a statement of fact. I believe this means the kingdom belongs to those who have finally just accepted the fact that they have this huge hole which constantly demands to be wanted, loved, and validated. It may be embarrassing and they may be humiliated by all they have done in an attempt to satisfy this hole, but still they have come to terms with this reality. This means they have accepted the truth that nothing they have

reached out for, nothing in the realm of humanity, can satisfy this hole (even romance). Thus, they live identified as those who are poor, beggarly, and completely impoverished of spirit. And since they have accepted this reality, they no longer hunger and thirst for personal validation from others (since they are convinced they can never get it from this world). Instead, they now and continually (it is rendered in the *present active participle*) hunger, pine for, and thirst for righteousness knowing that only Jesus satisfies. And Jesus guarantees this person is blessed or happy and satisfied, and that is also a statement of fact, rendered in the *future active indicative*. And not just satisfied, in the Greek, literally gorged or abundantly satisfied.

By the way, to now and continually hunger and thirst for righteousness is another way of saying that you fear the Lord, that you are a friend of God—one of those with whom He shares His secrets (***Psalm 25:12-14***). Remember, ***Proverbs 8:13*** says that to fear the Lord is to hate all evil. Or said another way, you have chosen to pine and thirst for Jesus who is our righteousness and thereby choose, by faith, to set aside all that is not Him, including the black flower and all the evil ways you have sought satisfaction from others.

Jesus took my black flower and put it on the altar and burned it away. It went up in smoke. But I had to do my work of believing by betting my life on the fact that Jesus can and will satisfy completely. That bet looked like pressing into the fire and the knife so this sickness can be cut out of me and burned up. God made the pathway clear. I had to give up all of that deep selfishness and temporary moments of satisfaction to which I was addicted to taking, and exchanging it for absolute vulnerability—i.e., living in the reality of my hole trusting Jesus to satisfy me. To me

it has now become an issue of faith. I know I am wanted and loved and I know Jesus satisfies completely. I have learned to be still, to be quieted, and know that He is God—that He is my God. I asked, “Was God enough.” And I heard that I have always been wanted, pursued, desired, validated, and loved in Him and before Him. He convinced me; I chose to believe He was enough.

Now He wants you to do the same. As I have been talking about this over the past couple of weeks, I know that some of you have started this same venture toward absolute vulnerability and trust. To you it has now become an issue of faith. I am so excited for you. I know that you will become convinced that Jesus is your God and your faith will remain, for He truly satisfies. As for the rest of you; it is time to make the same bet. It is time to let God prove Himself to you. Ask Him to show you the depth of this need to be wanted. Ask Him to make tangible all the ways you seek validation and affirmation. Ask Him to show you the choice you must make to hate all evil. He will do it. Then you, and you alone, will have to make the choice to make it an issue of faith and bet your life on Him no matter how vulnerable and strange it feels. And that is a safe bet for you have been wanted, pursued, desired, validated and loved with an everlasting love in Him and before Him. And remember, the Kingdom of God belongs to those ***who live by faith*** and embrace the poverty of their soul. They are truly blessed.

Let's pray.