

The Kingdom Belongs To...: Part 7

Let's quickly once again recap what we have learned. The Kingdom of God belongs to 1) those who ***do the will of the Father***. It does not matter what you do for God, what you do in His name, or all the goodness that practically results from what you do; all that matters is if you are doing the Father's will. For if you are not doing His will you are doing your will. 2) The Kingdom of God belongs to those who ***live by faith***. Everything in our lives must become an issue of faith—betting our lives on the truth. And since it is a zero sum reality, if you are not betting your life on the truth you are betting your life on the lie. 3) The Kingdom of God belongs to those who are ***poor in spirit***. The poor in spirit are those who are identified by their abject neediness and therefore chose to now and continually live in their absolute vulnerability and neediness while they wait upon the Lord to do everything He has promised. 4) The Kingdom of God belongs to those who are ***converted by God and choose, as a matter of lifestyle, to become like a little child***. In fact, if one does not choose to become needy and completely dependent upon their Father and look to Him to be their entire provision, just like a little child, they will never ever be able to enter the Kingdom of God.

To become like a little child you must be willing to walk away from your riches—from your wisdom, your emotional sense of reality, your justice, your rights, and so on. God even promises that if you trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own wisdom or understanding, but instead choose to fear the Lord by hating this evil of self-reliance, it will be healing to your body and refreshment or satisfaction to your bones (***Proverbs 3:1-8***). In other words, you can experience

satisfaction and contentment in the deepest parts of your soul. That part of your soul that is torn and results in craving, wanting, and that need for validation can be completely healed. In addition, the choice to dispossess yourself of self-reliance and control and become like a little child will make you the greatest in the Kingdom of God, as God will provide to you a remarkable spiritual maturity and depth that comes with His wisdom. All He asks is for you to actually deal with Him as your Father—trust Him—and choose to let go of all the ways you try and do His job.

Doing the will of the father, living by faith, being poor in spirit, and choosing to become like a little child, as a matter of lifestyle, after God has converted you: these are all absolute qualifications for possession of the Kingdom of God; and they are uncompromisingly exacting. Without these qualifications you will not enter the Kingdom of God—no how, no way.

You might be wondering, is that me or is that not me? It is a weighty question; and if you are unsure as to the answer then we—we—have some work to do. God has sent you to this body, this I know. It is therefore the job of everyone here to help make your choice to live by faith so tangible in your life. As we have studied, God has done His part, but now it is up to you to choose by faith to embrace your spiritual poverty (to be identified in it convinced you are safe and ok), to let go of your control and become totally dependent upon God, and to now and continually behold the Son for who He is—the Lord your God Almighty—and bet your life on His name. Our responsibility in your life therefore is never to oppose the truth, but to stand for the truth at all times (**2 Corinthians 13:8**). We cannot placate your emotions or allow ourselves to be manipulated into not standing for the truth because we are afraid of how you will react. It is God's job to deal with your

reactions, it is our job to always and continually speak the truth in love in order that you may grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ (***Ephesians 4:15***).

This is our responsibility; any other way of dealing with each other is not love. We must be vigilant in this regard. We must no longer let the lie (whether it is empowered by our emotions, the lusts in our body, or the wisdom of our minds) control in this body. We must choose, in gentleness and love, to be uncompromising in our demand for the truth over the lie in all areas of our life—again, everything must become to us a matter of faith with no exceptions. This does not leave room for you who are fearful and do not like confrontation to abdicate your responsibility to others in this body. It is your job, just as it is my job.

Besides, the Holy Spirit will enable you to do everything God has required of you; you just have to be willing to choose to do the will of the Father. When you think of the people in your life, it sounds like a huge requirement to always stand for the truth and to always speak the truth in love. After all, they are scary, they can hurt you, they can reject you, and they can turn on you. But don't worry about it. "For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him" (***Philippians 2:13***). Take confidence in this truth and bet your life on it. He is your Jehovah Jireh—the Lord your provision—always has been and always will be. Set aside your fear, set aside your trepidation, set aside your selfishness and self-protection, and choose instead to love those in this body by always standing for the truth and by always speaking the truth, in love.

Let's get back to the qualifications. If you choose to do the will of the father, live by faith, are poor in spirit, and become like a little child, as a matter of lifestyle,

after God has converted you, then I can guarantee that the next description of those to whom the Kingdom of God belongs will define you.

Matthew 5:10

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Let's start by stating the obvious. If yours is the Kingdom of heaven, then by definition you are blessed. In fact, being an adjective, "blessed" is what defines you. This means that your being "blessed" is not a matter of feelings nor is it a matter of reason, but of faith; for it is your spiritual reality whether you feel it or not. I know that many times we don't feel blessed, especially when we are being persecuted. Sadly, it is during those times that most of us become convinced that we are not blessed. But that is not a place you can allow yourself or one another to land. As with all things, this must be to you an issue of faith. If you are willing to bet your life on this truth, that you are blessed, and you incorporate this truth into your very identity, you will soon live as one who is blessed. And once it becomes part of your identity, you will be able to see all that happens while you journey through the kingdom of this world with a different perspective. Knowing you are blessed will bring stability to those deep inner places of your soul and allow you to know His joy in all things.

The next obvious thing is that simply being persecuted does not land you in God's Kingdom. People are persecuted for all sorts of reasons, just and unjust. In fact, this is one thing that all mankind shares in kind—we have all been persecuted. Rather,

you must be one who is persecuted for the sake of or better said, on account of, righteousness. What you will soon find out is that this righteousness, not surprisingly, incorporates aspects of both doing the will of the Father and living by faith. To understand this let's turn to **Romans 3**.

Romans 3:21-22

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe.

The righteousness of God is made manifest through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. In this passage, the phrase "faith in Jesus Christ" is a string of nouns. Thus, "faith" in this usage is not an action (not a verb); rather, it is a reality for all who now and continually believe (it is rendered in the *present active participle*). If you are one who now and continually believes in Jesus Christ, then by definition you live by faith. In other words, incorporating **Matthew 5:10**, blessed are those who have been persecuted because they now and continually **behold** the Son for whom He says He is (they do the will of the father) and they now and continually **believe** (they live by faith and bet their lives on the name of the Son of God).

The way this works is that if you are one who lives by faith, then the righteousness of God will be made manifest in and through your life and others will not like it. You will be persecuted because of what it means about their life. If the only way to experience the righteousness of God is to live with this sort of radical

belief in the Son, to stand in total vulnerability taking nothing into your own hands, then it means that they have fallen short. And that is not something they like or to which they will ever admit. So they do what comes natural, they attack all the while cloaking themselves in the raiment's of their religion and personal goodness. They make you the problem. They decide that you must be doing something wrong and that you are the one who is different and has changed; after all, you are not following the flow of all those who are like them. You become this very scary picture that insinuates that maybe, just maybe, they have it wrong. But they don't really care about having it wrong, they care about being right. And that is the drive and motivation behind their persecution.

The reason I am saying this is because of two passages. Follow me on this reasoning. Let's start with **John 7:1-7**. The background is that Jesus is talking to His brothers who, at that time, did not believe in Him. They were essentially mocking Him and told Him to go public, to go to Jerusalem (the festival of booths was near), and show Himself before the world. They told Him to let His deeds be made known to all. Jesus shot back with His own tone of sarcasm and said, "Now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime." He was making the point that they can go to Jerusalem and sacrifice to God anytime they want because it really does not mean a thing. He follows that thought by saying, "The world can't hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil." In other words, they were members of the kingdom of this world, they did not belong to the Kingdom of God because they did not believe in the Son. So all their religion, all their personal goodness, all their sacrifice and service, meant nothing to God. And that is why the world does not hate them. The implication is that if they, like Jesus, were to always stand for

the truth and always speak the truth they would likewise, by their very lives, accuse those in the world of evil. And like Jesus they would be hated. But since they are not hated, they are part of the world's religious system; and they are therefore loved and appreciated, just like everyone else who went to Jerusalem and sacrificed for God.

In contrast, if you come out of the world, if you leave behind both your religion and your personal goodness, and instead choose to now and continually stand naked, vulnerable, completely dependent upon Jesus, then you will not only be hated, you will be persecuted for truly believing in the Son and betting your life on His name.

John 15:18-22

If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the One who sent me.

Jesus' statement to His followers addresses so many things practically and emotionally. If you are not being loved any longer because you have chosen to take God at His word, but are being persecuted, hated even, it is both a wonderful sign

and a tragic sign. It is wonderful because it means that you are now no longer part of the world, and that is a statement of fact (rendered in the *present active indicative*), for you have been chosen by God to come out of the world, and that is also a statement of fact (rendered in the *aorist middle indicative*). That is the good news. The tragic side is that those who once used to “love” and “accept” you and who now persecute you are still lovers of this world, no matter how much they cloak it in God talk and religion. And He, Jesus, does not know them. This is a very hard truth to swallow.

And don't be fooled, as much as you desire for them to “get it” and to take God at His word, they won't listen to you because they have not listened to Him. And it is not that they have not heard; rather, they have not had ears to hear. Thus, they remain in darkness beholden to the king of this world. Accordingly, they will persecute you for they have rejected the Father and have chosen not to do His will. They may have seen Jesus and even proclaim Him as the Lord God Almighty, but they have chosen to not believe Jesus is the Lord God Almighty for their life. Jesus also said:

John 3:18-21

There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that

they are doing what God wants.

Think about those who have persecuted you. They don't come to understand what you are learning and why you are making the choices you are now making. Rather, they are just mad and want you to know it. They are afraid their sins will be exposed. They are afraid that after a life of dedication to God they are wrong; and how could they be wrong if everyone else lives this same way. But all who do evil, all those who choose not to become like a little child, hate the light and refuse to go near it. But those who are called and have been chosen from before time to come out from the world come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants (the will of God): they now and continually **behold** the Son for who He says He is (the Lord God Almighty) and they now and continually **believe** in the Son and bet their lives on all that He says He is. After all, His sheep hear His voice, He knows them, and they follow Him. Accordingly, those who do not follow Him are not His sheep (*John 10:26-27*).

Now there is one other thing very particular about our passage, but to understand it we need to read both *Matthew 5:10, 11 and 12* together.

Matthew 5:10-12

Blessed are those who have been **persecuted** for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and **persecute** you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they

persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This peculiarity that I mentioned is found in the use of the words “persecuted” in **5:10**, “persecute” in **5:11**, and “persecuted” in **5:12**. Clearly, in **5:10** and **5:12** it is speaking of past events. Those who have been persecuted, just like the prophets were persecuted. Hence, **5:12** is rendered in the *aoiist active indicative*. The *aoiist*, in this sense, refers to the past as a statement over their entire lives. Being persecuted is what they knew; and being in the *indicative* it is a statement of fact. In **5:11** when it says blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, it is very similar in that it is rendered in the *aoiist active subjunctive*. The *subjunctive* just means it has not actually happened yet but may happen. You just might, as a matter of your life, experience persecution from others. But what is peculiar to me is that in **5:10**, “persecuted” is oddly not rendered in the *aoiist* as in the other two verses, but in the *perfect passive participle*. This, I believe, brings a slightly different flavor into our understanding of **5:10** than it does to **5:11-12**.

I believe this communicates that even though people are the mechanism through which persecution comes into the lives of those to whom the Kingdom of God belongs, God is the one who appoints it. Being in the *passive voice*, I believe that God is the one who brings it about through people. Being in the *perfect tense*, I believe it is saying that these persecutions were always laid out and always planned for our lives, so we don't have to worry and we don't have to fret. He established the plan; and it was a perfect plan set into motion in the past and which has a continuing effect. And being a *participle*, this continues over and over again.

Ok, some of you might be confused. Let me simplify the explanation. The use of

the *perfect passive participle* distinct from the *aorist active* in the other two verses indicates that Jesus is the Lord God Almighty. From before time, He has perfectly prescribed each event of persecution that you experience and continue to experience and nothing and no one can thwart His plan for your life. Therefore, nothing you encounter is random, nothing is arbitrary, and nothing, nothing, is by chance. God, your God, has planned for it.

If you think about it, this is why you can rejoice and be exceedingly glad even in the midst of persecution. You can stand confident that your Lord God is in control of all things, every little detail. So you don't have to freak and you don't have to retaliate and take matters into your own hands. You never have to try and control what is happening. Rather, you can stand like a little child, completely vulnerable, waiting on God to defend you knowing that you are ok, confident that you are safe. Their accusations, insults, evil insinuations, and downright evil statements are accusations, insults, evil insinuations, and downright evil statements about Jesus. And He takes it all very personal. Remember, we studied that last week. According to **Matthew 18:5-6** how they treat you is how they treat Him and they will get their comeuppance in this life and the life to come.

This is why Jesus commands you to rejoice and commands you to be exceedingly glad, for your reward in heaven is great. Not surprisingly, rejoice is in the *present active imperative*. Every moment of your now you are commanded by Jesus to rejoice. However, be glad (or literally, be exceedingly glad) is in the *present middle imperative*. Thus, Jesus commands you to dig down deep in your soul and make the choice to be exceedingly glad every moment of your now regardless of what is happening to you. And since it is a command, it is removed out of the realm of

feelings or reason and into the realm of faith. In fact, this way of living is only possible by faith.

And keep in mind as we mentioned before, “God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him” (**Philippians 2:13**). So it is possible to live this way. Yes, all things are possible to those who believe (**Mark 9:23**). For with God, all things are possible (**Mark 10:27, 14:36**). In fact, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (**Philippians 4:13**). It is possible to rejoice and be exceedingly glad when you are persecuted for righteousness sake, for to you belongs the kingdom of God. And being rendered in the *present active indicative*, you know that it is a statement of fact regarding every moment of your now. You belong, you have a place, and it is yours. You have been chosen to come out of the world and you have chosen in return to leave this world. You are now a citizen of the Kingdom of God and your reward is great. You can handle every moment knowing that this world will pass away, including all of its lusts, but the one who does the will of the Father will live forever (**1 John 2:17**).

So people will persecute you because they do not actually know God. They will run from the light and will have no desire to come to the light because it will expose their evil deeds. Your life will reveal that all they have believed in, bet their lives upon, and are so passionately dedicated to, is a lie. Oh that they would have the humility to throw it all off and choose to now and continually enter through the narrow gate off faith down the road of tribulation—the road which few people find. But they do not know His voice, so they do not follow; besides they do not like a road that is marked by tribulation. Instead they would rather choose to justify their lives by what they have done, by their good choices, and all the ways they have

proven their love for God by all they have done for Him, just like so many others who walk the same path they walk.

But the Bible is clear, no flesh will glory, or be made right, in His presence. No one is justified by what they have “done for God,” but only by faith—only by betting their lives on the truth that Jesus is the Lord God Almighty (***Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16***). And we have learned what that means. It means we must be willing to do the will of the father, we must live by faith, we must be poor in spirit, and become like a little child.

Now you might be thinking, why does God plan persecutions for us? I believe it is how God shows to us, and gives us the opportunity to live out, our distinction. He wants us to know and be fully convinced that we do not belong to the kingdom of this world. After all, they persecuted Him in order that we might know that He did not belong to the kingdom of the world, He did not make His abode in this world, and He did not come to take over control of this world. And they will likewise persecute us in order that we might know that we do not belong to the kingdom of the world; after all, we did not come to take over and control of this world nor will we make our abode in this world. We have been called out of this world, just like Jesus. And persecution by others makes this clear to them and to us. This is another reason why we can rejoice and be exceedingly joyful. Our being persecuted because we bet our lives on His Word proves that we belong.

The Kingdom belongs to those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. And as part of your very identity, you can know that you are blessed. His blessing, His pleasure, and His delight is upon you. You have proven to yourself and

to others that He has indeed called you out this world. That is most definitely a reason to rejoice. With all these requirements for participation in the Kingdom being so uncompromisingly exacting, you are one of the few who have found it. Hallelujah. Rejoice. Be exceedingly glad, for you are blessed.

Let's Pray