

**3 - Kingdom Citizens**  
**Pastor Joe Oakley - GFC – 2/23/25**

One of the things that city officials do to honor people is to give them a key to their city. This practice goes back to medieval times when cities actually had walls and gates that locked. A key to the city gave you the power to unlock the gates and permission to come and go at will.

In current times – cities do not have gates to unlock – so the key is purely ceremonial. They are usually given to honor a distinguished person but they have no actual power. But we are in a series entitled Seize the Kingdom and I want you to know that the keys to the kingdom of God are not ceremonial!

The keys of the kingdom have actual power to open and close – to bind evil and loose good on the earth! I'm going to preach more on that next week. Today I'm preaching a message called Kingdom Citizens.

What I want you to understand today is that the keys of the kingdom are not given only to special distinguished people – they are given to every single citizen of the kingdom of God. Philippians 3:20 says:

***For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.***

Ephesians 2:19 says:

***Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.***

These verses show us that Christians are citizens of heaven – our home for eternity. We are also citizens of the household of God – that's called the church. The church is the kingdom of God on earth. Remember the kingdom of God is the domain where He exercises dominion. It is where people submit to His Lordship.

### **1- What is a Kingdom Citizen?**

Everyone who is saved and submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is a citizen of the kingdom of God. The word citizen comes from two words: city and denizen, meaning inhabitant. So, a citizen originally meant an inhabitant of a city.

It now has a broader meaning – it's a native-born or naturalized person who owes allegiance to a government and is entitled to certain rights, privileges and obligations.

Citizenship is one of the most sacred privileges of a nation.

It should not be taken lightly or awarded lightly.

What are some of the rights of citizens?

- Right to Vote
- Right to a fair trial and due process of law
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of religion
- Right to work
- Privilege of traveling

What are some of the obligations of citizens?

- Obey laws
- Pay Taxes
- Serve on a jury
- Vote

Likewise – in the kingdom of God – citizens have rights and obligations.

Please understand that **the kingdom of God is a government, not a religion**. It is the King's domain where the King exercises dominion. Isaiah 9:6-7 says:

***Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.***

***Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, establishing and up-holding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.***

The Kingdom of God has:

- A King named Jesus Christ
- A Constitution and Laws called the Bible
- A System to Raise Revenue called Tithing
- A System of Economic Provision called Sowing and Reaping
- A System of Education called the Equipping of the Saints
- An Army composed of Angels and spiritual warriors
- Ambassadors who represent the King on earth
- Also - the kingdom of God has citizens.

And when people understand what the kingdom of God is and what it offers, they will clamor to get in! One of the most controversial subjects these days is the subject of immigration. There are millions of people who want to enter the United States and there is debate over what we should do with those who are here illegally.

I'm not focusing on that debate today – I'm focusing on why they have risked life and limb to get here. What draws them here? Is it opportunity, better jobs, and higher pay? Yes. But many are drawn by the possibility of citizenship in the most influential nation in the world.

Citizenship is a powerful draw.

It causes people to press their way into a nation that offers a better life than the one they are currently living. Just like many people are trying to press into the United States, people will want to press into to the kingdom of God when they truly understand it. That's what Jesus meant in Luke 16:16 when He said -

***The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.***

When people hear the truth about the kingdom of God – they can't wait to cross that border!

## **2- How to Become a Kingdom Citizen**

There are two ways to become a citizen of earthly kingdoms:

- You are born there – that's called a native-born citizen – or
- You become a naturalized citizen, which means you go through the process of becoming a citizen in a country you were not born in.

To become a citizen of the kingdom of God – you must be born and naturalized. I know that sounds impossible – that's why Nicodemus was so confused in John 3:1-7.

***There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him."***

***Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, 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, "Most assuredly, 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 the 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.'***

Think about how confusing this was to Nicodemus. He knew you became a citizen by being born a citizen or by becoming a naturalized citizen. He wanted to see how to become a kingdom citizen, but Jesus said you must be born again to become a citizen.

Nicodemus knew it was impossible to be physically born again. But Jesus told him he must be born of water – that's physical – and born of spirit – that's spiritual. When you were born physically – you were born into a kingdom called the kingdom of darkness. So you must change kingdom citizenship.

Colossians 1:13 says:

***He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into***

***the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.***

There is only one way to enter the kingdom of God – you must be born again through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said that if you are not born again, you cannot see the kingdom nor can you enter the kingdom. What does it mean to see the kingdom? The Amplified Version of John 3:3 says:

***Jesus answered him, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, that unless a person is born again (anew, from above), he cannot ever see (know, be acquainted with, and experience) the kingdom of God.***

When you are born you have physical eyes with which you can see the natural world. Likewise, when you are born again you receive spiritual sight with which you can know and understand the things of God.

**People who are not born again cannot see or experience the kingdom of God. They are blinded to spiritual truth.**

2 Corinthians 4:4 says:

***The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.***

That's why there are people you try to have spiritual conversations with who cannot understand what you are saying. Fortunately, God did something about this! 2 Corinthians 4:6 says:

***For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.***

In other words, you cannot see the kingdom of God with your natural eyes. It is spiritually discerned. It is only by being born again that we can see the kingdom of God and enter the kingdom of God.

Now – many people do see the benefits of the kingdom of God and they try to enter it illegally. But-

### **3- No One can Enter God's Kingdom Illegally!**

There's only one way in! That one way is a narrow way and it's through faith in Jesus Christ. In John 14:6 Jesus said-

***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.***

But still some people try to go around God's one way. Here's how the Amplified Version translates Luke 16:16 -

***Until John came, there were the Law and the Prophets; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone strives violently to go in (would force his own way rather than God's way into it).***

What are some of the ways people try to enter the kingdom illegally? We get some wisdom about that in the story of Nicodemus. That story shows us that no one is exempt from the need to be born again to be saved.

- **Some people try to enter God's kingdom by good works –**

Many people think “I’m not so bad. God will let me in to heaven.” But they fail to realize that none of us is good enough on our own. You can’t do enough good to enter the kingdom of God by works. We all need a Savior. John 3:1 says:

***There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.***

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, which was one of the strictest branches of Judaism. They were very careful to follow God’s laws, but Jesus still said that Nicodemus needed to be born again. **You can be a good person, not break laws, and live a moral life, but you must be born again in order to enter God’s kingdom.**

There are many people who think they will go to heaven when they die, but they are sadly mistaken. Jesus addressed that in Matthew 7:21-23

***Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'***

These people did good works in the name of Jesus but it did not save them and give them kingdom citizenship. Moral goodness won’t save you. You must be born again through repentance and faith in Jesus.

- **Some try to enter God's kingdom by Religion –**

Many people are counting on getting into heaven because they are religious and belong to a certain church. Nicodemus was a deeply religious man, a Jew, but he still needed to be born again.

Just because you go to church does not mean you will go to heaven! No church can get you into heaven! Religion can’t get you into heaven! **You can be religious and church going, but you must be born again.**

In Luke 13:24-27 Jesus said:

***Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house***

***gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'***

***Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'***

Jesus is telling us that just going to church and spending time in His presence does not open the doors to the kingdom of heaven. Just because we heard His word does not open the doors for us.

As Jesus said in John 3 – only those who are born again through faith in Jesus Christ will enter the kingdom of heaven! Those who try to enter in another way will find the door locked!

- **Some try to enter God's kingdom by position or power –**

But position, power and prestige won't save you. Nicodemus was a member of the ruling council, the top of the ladder in his society, but Jesus said, you must be born again. You can have power, position and prestige, but you must be born again.

- **Some try to enter God's kingdom by their own wisdom –**

So many people think they can make up their own way to heaven. What an arrogant thing - to think you are wise enough to create a way to heaven on your own.

But your own wisdom or education won't save you. Nicodemus spent his life learning. In fact, he was so educated that Jesus said in John 3:10 ***"You are Israel's teacher."*** But Jesus still told him he needed to be born again.

- **Other people think they can enter God's kingdom because God loves them.**

In other words, some people think, "Since God is love, it doesn't matter what I do or what I believe, a loving God will not allow anyone to go to Hell." The most memorized verse in the Bible is John 3:16.

***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***

Some people have changed its meaning to "For God so loved the world that no one ever shall perish but everyone will have everlasting life."

They think that because God is a God of love that it doesn't matter whatsoever I believe or whatsoever I do – but just because I'm a whosoever - God will still let me into heaven. Whatever! This is a deadly mistake that has eternal consequences.

**Yes, God is love and nothing will separate you from His love, but God's love is not the way to salvation. God's love made a way of salvation. And it's the only way of salvation.**

For God so loved that He gave His son – the way the truth and the life – and if you believe in Him you will not perish but have everlasting life. Not – I've got eternal life because God loves me. Or – because I'm not that bad. Or because I've earned it. Or because I go to church No – Unless you are born again through faith in Jesus Christ, you cannot see the kingdom nor enter the kingdom.

The invitation to be part of God's family is universal, but there is one condition: profession of faith in Jesus. Galatians 3:26 says:

***For we are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.***

John 1:12-13 says:

***To all who did accept Him and believe in Him He gave the right to become children of God. They did not become his children in any human way -- by any human parents or human desire. They were born of God.***

I tell you confidently that Nicodemus probably lived a more moral life than any of us, but Jesus said he needed to be born again. That only happens by the grace of God. We can't work our way in. We can never do enough on our own to be kingdom citizens.

Some people say that Christianity is a crutch for weak people. I tell them they've got it half right. We are weak people. In fact, we are so weak we need more than a crutch. A crutch implies we still have some of our own strength. A crutch implies we can limp our way to heaven – hobble our way in. No, Christianity is more like a stretcher because we have no strength of our own. We can't limp our way in – we must be carried. We are like the lame man by the pool of Bethesda who cannot walk on his own. We need the healing touch of Christ. No, we are more like Lazarus – dead and buried and bound by grave clothes. We can do nothing - absolutely nothing without the life and power of Jesus Christ.

The truth is, we are all totally without strength. Romans 5:6 & 8 says:

***For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

Don't think you can limp into heaven on your own. You don't have enough strength, goodness or wisdom to get into heaven on your own! You must be born again to become a kingdom citizen!