

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Week 7 - Day 4: A New Kingdom Posture Towards Life

As I started to prepare the write up for this lesson, I did not think I would detail out many scriptures. I listed the references but wondered if everyone would gain better clarity if they read and highlighted the scriptures which spoke to them individually, in their own Bibles. But as I was reading the passages of scripture – back to back, the message became so clear. The beauty of the message is evident in the repetition of the concept, over and over again. Each example clarifies what it means to live the ‘kingdom life’ of love even in the midst of suffering and why we are called to do it. It felt almost like the Holy Spirit was highlighting the text for me and burning it into my soul. I would like to invite you now into that same experience. Will you read these verses and write a brief reflection before we jump into today’s lesson? What is the Holy Spirit telling you?

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:19-22

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 2:17-19, 26

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

James 4:7-10

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

1 Peter 1:6-9, 22-23

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

1 Peter 2:21-25

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²² “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵ For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1 Peter 4:12-19

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” ¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

2 Peter 1:3-7

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶

and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

2 Peter 3:10-16

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 4:7-12, 19-21

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

1 John 5:1-5

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God

overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

2 John 1:6

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

3 John 1:5-8

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. ⁶ They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. ⁷ It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. ⁸ We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.

Jude 1:17-23

But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” ¹⁹ These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. ²² Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers:

Here is what the Spirit has shared with me.

As we have seen this week, there is a tension between our status as saved kingdom people in Jesus Christ and our existence in a world that is marked by the effects of sin and Satan's kingdom. How then are we called to live in a world that will be hostile towards us?

As God's kingdom ambassadors, there is a posture we are called to take and guiding principles for why we take that posture. It was modeled for us by Jesus, our King himself. It's incredibly easy to see in the scripture and incredibly easy to recite. Yet, it is incredibly difficult to live.

Let's explore this together and dig a little deeper into the scriptures.

Right away I noticed the need to be obedient. We were created with free will, so obedience is a choice. It is however the first step, the start of humility is to obey what the scripture says. We have to make these choices every step of the way, the choice to consider suffering joy (James 1:2) and with that knowledge obey what the scripture says (James 1:22). We have to humble ourselves (James 4:10) and accept that we will suffer (1 Peter 1:6), this should not be a surprise (1 Peter 4:12). We have to know that this is demonstrating love, that we walk in obedience to the commands of Jesus (2 John 1:6) The posture to choose is to be obedient to Christ, anticipating suffering and still choosing to represent God's kingdom love to those of the world.

It is also very clear Jesus modeled this behavior for us. The details of how He bore our sin on the cross and examples of how He lived - committing no sin, telling no lies, not retaliating to insults and making no threats when suffering (1 Peter 2:21-25) are here as guidelines. Jesus placed His trust in the Father who would judge fairly and he died in the place of our sin so we

might have freedom. Most importantly He has given us everything we need to live this life if we know Him (2 Peter 1:3). We as Christians are called to live this way, because we have been born again; born of imperishable seed through the living and enduring word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

We should be His example to the world, modeling what kingdom love looks like while suffering.

It is also clear that whether we are modeling 'kingdom love while suffering' ourselves in our everyday actions, or while supporting others we are called to look to Christ and the Holy Spirit to fuel us in these actions.

Jude 1:21 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

We can't rely on the metrics of the world, everything of the world (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life) comes NOT from the Father, but from the world (1 John 2:16). Everything in this world will pass away, in fact only those who do the will of God will live forever (1 John 2:17). Based on biblical description – these times will not be pretty or fun (2 Peter 3:10-11). Focusing on God's love for us, reminding ourselves He is the source of love, and remembering loving each other allows His love to be made complete (1 John 4:7-12, 19-21) – these things are the fuel, the food for our souls. His love allows us to remain faithful to our Christian brothers and sisters in their missions (3 John 1:5-8), to show mercy to those in doubt, and to even be fearless showing mercy to others we snatch from the fire. We are modeling 'kingdom love' while suffering in every situation.

So why is it so hard?

We can easily say – it's because we are sinners, we live in sinner's paradise, we can't achieve perfection until we meet Christ. Cliché answers which keep us surface level in our transformation.

I have a friend and we were having a conversation about being house blind. You know – you have a pile of mail on the table, and it starts to grow. You aren't really using that table, so the pile keeps growing. Eventually you eat at a different table, and you don't notice the mail anymore. You start piling up catalogs on the current table you are eating at. Finally, company comes over, and you realize – when you can't serve them dinner at either table, that you have all this mail and all these catalogs. You've actually become so used to them; you've forgotten they were piling up. House blind. Depending on your comfort level, you might panic and clean the tables before the company comes, or you clean 1 table, or you have company eat with you on the sofa in front of the tv.

I wonder, have we become house blind to comfort? Even that thought sounds ridiculous. Yet, as Christians, we are supposed to expect discomfort. We are taught to endure suffering and trials and consider them joy, while we are modeling Christ's love to the marginalized in the world; and not to worry about fitting into this current world.

2 Peter 3:13-14 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

The bible advises that in the last days it will be more important than ever to lean into the Holy Spirit, as there will be an element who is ungodly scoffing at our way of life and trying to divide us.

Jude 1:18-19 They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

As we have lived in a nation with generally more than enough food; and jobs; and cars; and technology – have we layered comfort after comfort onto our lives? Have we become so comfortable, we only understand discomfort if it is egregious to us personally – a terminal illness, a major wrong against us, a decision that doesn't go our way?

I am not advocating a complete turnaround and abandonment of all the things that bring us comfort in our lives, but what if we started peeling back some of those layers, to get closer to the suffering mentioned in the bible. The suffering as a result of living more like Christ. Walking in obedience to His commands – the greatest of which are to love God more than anything (including our comfort) and to love our enemies as ourselves. Remember our Kingdom definition – God's **rule** over God's **people** in God's **place**. In God's kingdom we are obedient and follow His rules regardless of what might come our way!

But there is a tremendous beauty in the reminder that the Day of the Lord is coming; where sin and suffering will be no more and God's rule will be complete over all things! Our next lessons will explore the book of Revelation. Get ready because it is always thrilling to learn more about the hope we have in the full kingdom to come.

-Liza Landrum

Share the Gospel: Jesus is calling us into his own lifestyle of love and obedience to his authority. Since we live in a fallen world, we should expect to experience suffering but we are continuing to learn how to choose obedience to God's kingdom rule above what is temporary in this kingdom!