

Citizens & Strangers (Part 8) – Righteousness and Reward

Matt Chandler – April 22, 2018

[Video]

Female: The kingdom of God is as multifaceted and mysterious as our Creator, a kingdom we only see now through a glass darkly. Though we can't picture it fully, God's kingdom is the story told in Scripture, from the garden to the city, and in the middle of the story God chose to reveal his kingdom in a new way.

The gospel is not only Jesus coming and dying to save us from our sins; it's also the story of God establishing his dwelling, dominion, and dynasty in the world. We live as both citizens and strangers, prisoners of hope in this shadow kingdom, all while knowing it's not our true home, that something better is coming, that God's perfect kingdom *is* coming.

[End of video]

Good morning. Are we doing well? All right. Let's do this. If you're a first through fifth grader, why don't you do me a favor? Stand up for me really quickly, all right? If you want to stand in the chair and your parents are cool with that, do it. I wouldn't do it up *there*. We won't be responsible for broken arms and/or ankles. Just stand up so we can see you.

I know we've done it already, but will you welcome this gaggle of giftedness into our gathering? Stand up for a second. Let me chat with you. Look right at me. Listen. I love that you're in here. We love that you're in here. I want you to hear from me that what we see in the Bible is Jesus loving that you're with us and around us. There's this beautiful story in Matthew 19 where Jesus makes a really big deal about you being able to hear about him, believe in him, and love him.

I want you to know not only do I love that you're in here and I hope *we* love that you're in here, but also there's something in our Bibles that would lead us to believe *Jesus* loves that you're in here.

Why don't you have a seat? Here's my promise to you as first through fifth graders. I need about 25 minutes from you. Parents, yes, I can. Kids, did you bring your Bibles? If you brought your Bibles, just raise up your Bibles so I can see you have them.

Here's what we're going to do. If you got your little notes worksheet when you came in, let me introduce myself. This is a little bubble, like who's talking today. You can call me Pastor Matt. If your parents want you to call me Mr. Chandler, whatever. Your parents rule, but for the case of your little sheet, I am Pastor Matt.

Here's where we're going in our Bibles. We're going to be in Matthew, chapter 6. We're going to look at 24 verses there. I know that sounds like a lot of verses, because it is, but we're going to look at those 24 verses in our 20-something minutes together. Let me tell you about the things we've been talking about in here.

Over the last six to seven weeks, we've been talking about the kingdom of God. That's what we've been talking about: God's kingdom. We've been using these words. We've been talking about *dwelling* or the fact that we have been created for the presence of God. You would know this in this language: God wants to talk with us. We've been created to be in the presence of God, and God wants us to be in his presence. That's part of his kingdom.

Then we've also been talking about *dominion*. When we talk about *dominion*, we're saying God has given us a really big, important job to do that flows out of knowing him and being in his presence. Then lastly, we've been talking about *dynasty*. What we mean when we say that is, for those who love and trust in Jesus, they will spend forever with God forever. I know that's redundant. That's what we've been covering.

If I could simplify all of that into a statement I know you know, it's that God is in charge of...what? Everything! Thank you for the passion over there. Right? Yes! God is in charge of everything. Even when it seems like, "Man, is God in charge of that?" the kingdom and God's reign in the kingdom shows there will be these moments where God breaks through the ordinary and shows he indeed is ruling, reigning, and in charge even of that. Those are the things we have been covering in here: God is in charge of everything.

Now with that said, we're going to read 24 verses. I know that is a lot, so let's do this. Because we're a mixed group today, why don't we stand while we read God's Word together? I'm just going to read it as it is out of the ESV Bible we read out of here. Starting in verse 1...

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.' For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body.

So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

May God bless the reading of his Word. Have a seat.

When we think about kingdom, like if we've just in our imaginations begun to think about a kingdom, there are probably some images that are going to come into your mind. Maybe you think about a castle or a throne. One of the things we're going to think about when we talk about the kingdom of God is God as the King of the kingdom. He is all-powerful. He is all-knowing. Whatever he says goes because he is the King.

Yet the King of the kingdom (Jesus Christ)... In fact, Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is not just King, but he is King of all kings. He is not just Lord; he is Lord of all lords. You get this imagery of this all-powerful King who is ruling the kingdom, and yet the King of that kingdom is saying now that when we think about God, it's also good, it's also right, to think about God not just as King but as Father.

In fact, I tried to emphasize it while we read the text that over and over and over again Jesus is saying, "God is our Father. He is not just all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere, but he is also our Father." Now look right at me. He is not like any kind of human father ever. Let's just talk a little bit about God's "fatherness." All right?

God is a father who is always patient. He is *always* patient. He has never pulled over the car, looked in the back, and said, "I'll burn the whole thing down" like that. God has never done that. He has never lost his patience...ever. Think about that! He has never lost his patience. He will never abandon us. He will never harm us. He always does good to us. He never runs out of love for us.

Listen to this. He always has time. Always! Our heavenly Father has never said, "Can you come back later? I really have to knock this out" or, "Not now!" I need you to hear this. Whether your dad was as *awesome* as a human dad could be or as *awful* as a human dad could be, the God of the Bible in his fatherly love for us transcends that, and he is completely other than, he is completely different than, any human father ever.

In fact, he would even say to the best of us, the best dads imaginable, "If you who are sinners know how to do good by your kids, how much greater is your Father's love in heaven?" Jesus is saying even the best dad imaginable who only loses his patience...I don't know...six or seven times a week... The best dad imaginable, even though he has a ton of work going on, who makes space to hear from you, talk with you, and play with you, the best dad...

Jesus is saying, "No, no, no. Your heavenly Father is so much better than your earthly father." He smokes him! He is always available. He always wants to hear from you, no matter what you want to talk about. If you want to come in and just do that weird thing where you just start talking without even... It's just verbal diarrhea. It's just coming out. You're talking about school, video games, the dog, this cat your friend has, and this person you don't even know but you like.

God is like, "Yes, yes, yes! Talk to me more about that" without needing a lot of clarifying questions like, "What are you saying? I don't know what you're talking about." Our heavenly Father is not in that way. He is just like, "Yes! Keep talking! Keep talking!" whereas your earthly father would be like, "I love you. I just need you to stop talking for a little bit. Okay? Just stop. Let me get my bearings. Just give me a second."

Your heavenly Father is just never like that. Grown-ups, I'm talking to you! Don't do that thing where you're starting thinking about your parenting skills. We're not talking about you. We're talking about *your* heavenly Father. Despite how *your* earthly father was, it's a different kind of father. Did you have a great father who kind of rubbed off on you so you're being a great father? When you think about how you feel about your kids, Jesus is just saying, "Your heavenly Father is just better than that. Whatever *that* is, he is better."

Let me say it this way. One of the things that's happening in this text is we're getting a picture of this. If you have your little notes, kids, here's where I'm going to take us over the course of the next 10 minutes. *God is a good Father who protects his children.* That's what we're talking about. God is a good Father who protects his children.

One of the things that's going on in this text is Jesus is warning the children of God about some really dangerous stuff. Part of what's happening in Matthew, chapter 6, verses 1 through 24, is Jesus saying, "Hey, don't run with scissors. Don't play in traffic." I don't know if you know this, kids, but when parents say, "You probably shouldn't play with fire," they're not trying to take from you some illicit joy. They're trying to keep you from burning yourself and the house down. It's not about you having fun; it's about you being safe.

Jesus here is saying, "Hey, be careful as sons and daughters of God because there is a wrong way to do the right thing that ultimately can harm you." The text is crazy because what Jesus begins to warn about is giving to the poor. He is warning about praying, and he is warning about fasting. Now those are things usually you don't get warned about.

Kids, have your parents ever come to you and said, "I just want to warn you I think you're praying too much, and I want you to quit it"? Any kid in here would be like, "Yeah, my parents would rather me not pray"? No, no, no. You don't, but Jesus here is going, "Hey, you can do what's right wrongly." Let me tell you the two dangers the children of God are being warned about in this text (at least *part* of what's going on in this text). The first is there is a warning of...

1. *The danger of being dishonest.* We would use the word *hypocrisy*. Jesus uses the word *hypocrisy*. He is warning them about the danger of dishonesty. It's not just telling a lie, which is one thing but...look at me...*living* a lie, which is another thing altogether. You have these warnings built around really good gifts God has given us.

He says when you give to the needy, don't do it so everyone would see you and think you're awesome because you do it. He is saying that's dangerous. Let me try to explain why that's dangerous. Look at me. What God wants, what God is after, is really, really simple. Are you ready? Look right at me. Here's what God is after. Are you ready? This is crazy. *You!* Your heart.

It's not just ultimately that you would act *this* way and not act *this* way, although he is serious about that. What he wants and what gets us there is he wants *you*. You were created for his presence, and he has been pursuing us since day one. We've been talking about this in here. The whole Bible is about God with us. That's the whole point of the Book.

Here is how obedience works. It cannot work any other way in order to please God. I'll just put it up here. The kids will know this. Grown-ups, it would be great for us to know this and live this. The way to obedience goes along this continuum. We know God. There is no obedience that pleases God outside of a relationship with God. All that does not proceed from faith is...what? That's disappointing to me as the pastor. *Sin* is what the Bible says. We'll preach from that text later, just kind of get it in us.

You can obey the Ten Commandments. You can obey the Beatitudes. But if you don't know God, it doesn't matter. You cannot save yourself through your own righteousness. Are you with me? Okay. So to know God then is to love God and have that love of God grow, and that growing love of God leads to a growing trust of God that leads to glad-hearted obedience rooted in a loving, trusting relationship with the God of the universe.

You cannot get to knowing God through obedience to God. When we give in to the impulse that is our sinful nature to try to earn what he is freely giving, we don't get the thing we need the most. Therefore, Christianity (or trying to live for God) feels crushing, weighty, and lonely because it was meant not to flow from obedience to knowledge but knowledge to obedience.

Really the call on your life and my life is to give ourselves with great discipline and effort over to cultivating a love relationship with the God of the Bible. We're not giving ourselves over with great discipline to do what's right and not do what's wrong. No, no, no. What we're giving our primary energy over to is I want to know him, and I want to love him. I want to know him, and I want to love him.

In knowing him and loving him, I'm growing in trust of him, and I'm going to do what he says because I know he loves me. I know he is for me. I know he will not harm me, and he is out to protect me. That's what this "Don't run with scissors" stuff is about! The commands in the Bible about, "Do these things. Do these things" are about your protection. They're about that tension between flourishing and the cross.

We see this around giving. We see this around praying. Then we also see it around fasting, but I want to talk about fasting because it might be a new concept for all of us (adults included). When we talk about fasting, what we're talking about is giving up a good thing for a better thing. It's giving up a *good* thing for a *better* thing. Let me give you two kind of common examples.

First, let's take food. Instead of lunch, which is a good thing... Chick-fil-A is a good thing! It's a good gift of God's grace. You have Chick-fil-A, Chipotle, or whatever your go-to is. It's there for you, and that's a good thing. It's a gift of God to you. What fasting is, "That's a good gift from God, but instead of participating in this good thing, I'm going to instead forgo that. Then I'm going to do a better thing. I'm going to spend that hour I was going to spend with those waffle fries and that Chick-fil-A sauce and instead..."

By the way, I'm doing this because you have no shot at getting it today. I'm helping you...longing, anticipation, and all those great Christian themes. Instead of enjoying that, I'm going to take this hour, and I'm going to pray and I'm going to be with the Lord, because he is a better thing.

Another common one in our day and age is instead of screen time, I'm going to spend time in front of the Word of God. I'm going to get to know him better. I'm going to take a deep dive into *this* book of the Bible, into *this* passage of Scripture. I'm going to spend that time. I'm going to fast from this *good* thing, and I'm going to do this *better* thing.

Jesus is saying when you're trying to go from obedience to knowledge, you fast, but you're going to be gloomy, and you want everybody to know about it. You're going to be like *this* guy. Let me say this. This is what Jesus is saying. "Don't do *this*." Right? Don't be like, "Hey, what's going on?"

"Hey, buddy. You look run down. Are you all right?"

"Well, yeah. I'm fasting. I mean, it's just... Gosh! I mean, Jesus is so great. I'm starving to death right now. In fact, I'm experiencing an emotion right now called *hangriness*. I'm going to need you to not talk to me anymore because I've been spending so much time with Jesus. It's been beautiful."

We're giggling, but Jesus is saying, "People are doing this! They're doing it under the false pretense that they want me, know me, and love me. They don't. They're trying to use my name for the applause of men rather than knowing me. They're like people who pretend to like me only to want nothing to do with me when no one is watching."

This is the accusation Jesus makes. He goes, "When you fast, you put on some cologne and wash your face. You put on some cologne and wash your face when you're fasting. Nobody needs to know you're fasting. You're fasting before the Lord and to commune with the Lord, not for the approval of men." This is the danger. Don't be dishonest. Walk in honesty.

What does that mean? That means I want to grow in a love for the Lord, and I'm going to give myself over to a love for the Lord. That's going to involve giving, and that's going to involve praying. That's going to involve fasting, but that's between me and my Father who delights in me, loves me, and always wants me to get up into his presence.

2. *The danger of idolatry.* In this text in particular it's the idolatry of materialism. Okay. Let's chat. How many of you love Christmas morning? Like, Christmas morning is epic. Go ahead! Get that hand up! Yeah! Hey, Christmas morning is legit! Does anybody get to open up a present on Christmas Eve? You get that one present. Is it always pajamas and/or socks? I don't want to give anything away here, but I remember just as a kid being like, "Oh yes! Oh, come on! It's underwear? Are you serious?" It's just like, "Thanks, Mom." You know? "Thanks, Dad."

Let's have a really cool talk about Christmas. How many of you got something on Christmas morning that you actually broke by the end of Christmas Day? Has anybody broken one of your favorite toys day of? Go ahead, and get your hand up. There's no shame in this place. This is a shame-free zone. Go ahead! All right. Has any of you lost whatever that was, have no idea where it is right now? How many of you have lost it, and that's just fine? You lost it, and you're like, "No, I don't know where it is, but I'm all right. I'm doing fine."

One of the things we can pick up on in the gifts of Christmas morning is that to build our lives around and to build our hopes around things we can lose, that can be stolen from us, or that can break, and not long after we get it, we don't care anymore about it is that to pursue with our lives the idea that stuff is going to make us happy and stuff is going to fulfill what's broken in us is a fool's errand. It's not going to work for you as children, and it certainly doesn't work for us as adults. Look at me. All of us in varying seasons believe it will.

"If I could just move into *this* neighborhood... If I could just drive *this* kind of car... If I could just..." Right? These are lies grown-ups believe just like kids believe, "If I could just get an Xbox, or if I could just play Fortnite whenever I wanted to, or if I could just..." Right? These are the lies we believe, and Jesus is exposing it right now. It's like don't bet your life on that. No, no, no. Bet your life on knowing the Lord and having a reward that's going to come from him that's eternal.

Now let me close with this. I told you there are two things with which I want to close. The first is I have a 15-year-old, a 12-year-old, and a soon to be 9-year-old. I alone am their dad. No one else on

earth gets that privilege but me. It is mine and mine alone. It doesn't matter how awesome of a man you are, you will never be my kids' dad. That has been given to me, and I find in me at times a deep ache for them.

Does that resonate with anybody? It's an ache. I want good for them. I want what's true for them. I want what's right for them. I want what's beautiful for them. I can feel that ache when they do something that just kind of blows my mind. Lauren texted me this morning (I was already here) and just said, "I can hear Reid listening to worship music and singing upstairs in his room." What does that do to me as a dad? I mean, let me tell you. I just swell, and I ache. I want for him all the more.

What Jesus is going to argue is that ache I have for my kids to grow, to flourish, to have what is good is not even worthy to compare to God's desire for me and God's plan for those of us who are his children. He is the kind of father who delights, rejoices in, wants me to come and babble about...

I have to imagine the things I am talking about to God oftentimes have to be a little bit like what my kids used to babble about to me when they were 4 or 5 years old, where it was like, "Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Okay. All right. All right. Uh-huh." The Lord knows all, is everywhere. It's like, "Uh-huh. Yeah! Oh, man. I love that. Yeah!" If we could ever believe that, I just wonder what might change.

Here's the second thing. Then I want to show us a video, and then we're going to sing. Singles. I can only imagine this is the kind of weekend that can be somewhat difficult for you. So let me just lay this before you. I was listening to some things this week and reading some things this week. One of the things I listened to was talking about singleness, the life of singles, and kind of how weird it is in 2018 (this kind of new way of doing life and how people are getting married later and later and later).

Anyway, one of the things the guy was saying is what Jesus is going to teach about marriage is it's a picture of a greater reality we no longer need in glory. We won't be given to one another in marriage the way we're given to one another here. One of the points he made is, for married folk, there is something sad about that...hopefully. Hopefully you're not like, "Oh, no, no, no. That's great news. Come, sweet, sweet death."

If that's where you are, come chat with us. Let us help serve, love, and encourage you. One of the things I want you to hear me say is in God's kind of redemptive arc, he is moving marrieds toward

you, not you toward us. In God's redemptive arc, what we he is looking for is wholehearted single devotion, undistracted to him and his glory.

In this season of your life, singles, God has given you *this*. Maybe not forever. It's not wrong to desire more than that. It's not, but he is giving that to you as a gift of his grace. You are an undistracted person whereas marrieds are distracted. What God is going to do in time is make us like you. I want you to hear from me. We love that you're here. We think you're needed in this congregation. We think you're a part of this process of shaping us as a congregation. I just don't want you to think you're not thought of, wanted, or considered on a weekend like this, because you are.

Now here's the video I want to show you. What we're desperate to see happen in our midst is moms and dads (or Mom *or* Dad) really own the spiritual formation of their children in a way that doesn't have to do with punting it to us as a church. We want to come alongside of you and encourage you. We want to give you tools. We want to help you, encourage you, and cheer you on, but we think *you're* the one who should be having spiritual conversations at home.

Here's what we did. We sent a few cameras home with some families just as they try to talk to their kids about what they learned in Kids Village. My hope is it will embolden you to make your dinner table, your car, and these other places as opportunities to have spiritual conversation about what ultimately is going to matter. All right? We're going to watch this video, and then we're going to sing.