

JMBC

2021 Theme

“Kingdom Citizens Striving to Advance the Kingdom of God on Earth as it is in Heaven”

Matthew 6:10



KINGDOM BIBLE STUDY

GOD'S MASTER PLAN

January Emphasis

Sharing love and establishing unity in the Kingdom

January 3 LESSON ONE:
It Starts with Showing True Love
I John 4:19-21

January 10 LESSON TWO:
We Are All One in Christ Jesus
Galatians 3:25-29

January 17 LESSON THREE:
Showing Mercy and Compassion
Zachariah 7:8-10

January 24 LESSON FOUR:
Living in Harmony With Each Other
Romans 12:15-18

January 31 LESSON FIVE:
God Looks on the Inside
I Samuel 16:6-7

KEY WORDS:

Love, Harmony, Compassion, Unity

February Emphasis

Building Bridges and Creating New Relationships Across Racial Lines

February 7 LESSON SIX:
Created Equally by God
Genesis : 1:27-28

February 14 LESSON SEVEN:
Being Kind to Foreigners
Leviticus 19:33-34

February 21 LESSON EIGHT:
Tearing Down Barriers
John 4:4-10

February 28 LESSON NINE:
The Kingdom is For Everyone
Revelation 7:9-12

KEY WORDS: Building, Relationships,
Race, Ethnicity, Foreigner

March Emphasis

Getting Right With Ourselves

MARCH 7 LESSON TEN:
Being True to Ourselves
Matthew 7:1-5

MARCH 14 LESSON ELEVEN:
Did You Fail the Test?
II Corinthians 13:5-6

MARCH 21 LESSON TWELVE:
No Favoritism in the Kingdom
James 2:1-7

MARCH 28 LESSON THIRTEEN:
Don't Let the Stones Cry Out For You!
Luke 19:37-40 **(PALM SUNDAY)**

KEY WORDS: Self Examination,
Prejudice, Favoritism, Selfishness

Week of December 28, 2020– January 3, 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

**JANUARY EMPHASIS: SHARING LOVE AND ESTABLISHING UNITY
IN THE KINGDOM**

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that we should exemplify God's love and work across social barriers to build bridges of unity and hope.

WORDS: Love, Harmony, Compassion, Unity

LESSON ONE: IT STARTS WITH SHOWING TRUE LOVE

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What do you mean when you say you love God?
2. Are there people who you hate?
3. Do you feel you can love God and still hate a brother or sister?

TEXT: I JOHN 4:19-21

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE FIRST STEP IN TEARING DOWN SOCIAL DIVISIONS AND BUILDING BRIDGES IS TO RECEIVE GOD'S LOVE AND APPLY IT TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

INTRODUCTION: 2020 was a year of change. The onset of COVID-19 upset our daily lives and made us adjust to a new reality. The death of George Floyd and many others brought the problem of racial injustice to the forefront. The presidential election saw our society, and indeed members of the body of Christ, divided along social and ideological lines. How to deal with these and many other problems has divided our nation and now presents great challenges to Kingdom citizens who should be keenly focused on unity in the Kingdom. **Our mission for 2021 should be to confront these challenges.** What does God's Word say about things like racism, prejudice, and discrimination? *How can you love God and hate your Brother and Sister?* For the month of January, we will be focusing on the need for Kingdom citizens to remain focused on tearing down barriers that divide us and maintaining our focus on unity in the Kingdom. We will examine five steps to tearing down social divisions and building bridges of love and unity by beginning with sharing love as described in I John 4:19-21.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT GOD SHOWS THE BEST EXAMPLE OF HOW WE SHOULD LOVE EACH OTHER BY HOW HE LOVES US. (V 19)

The primary way Christians are to be recognized is by love. This is not merely what we feel, but what we do for others. True, godly love is the most powerful evidence of being "born again" as a child of God. This love comes from God who loved us before we

loved Him. John tells us that ***“We love because he first loved us.”*** (V 19) When we live in obedience to God, according to love, we can be confident in our relationship with Him. This confidence must be the foundation for our love with our fellow brothers and sisters. **This is not a request by God; this is a command from God.** There is just one source of love, and that is God. There can be no love in the human heart until the love of God comes in and creates it there. We love because God first loved us. We cannot allow uncivility, social upheaval, racism, and social injustice separate us from God and divide us from each other. We must not let skin color or social status blind us to the **“oneness”** that God desires in the Kingdom. We cannot sidestep the command that we love God without accepting His mandate that we love each other.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT SAYING WE LOVE GOD AND NOT LOVE EACH OTHER MAKES US LIARS AND HYPOCRITES. (V 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.” (V 20 NIV) The message is clear: **God-ward love and human directed love cannot be separated.** You cannot love God and not love others. The absence of love for one another shows an absence of love for God, regardless of what we claim. ***“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*** (V 8) Loving God and loving others cannot be separated. We think loving God is easy, and loving others is hard. God says that if we do not love one another who we have seen, then we cannot love God whom we have not physically seen. **If you claim you can, then you are a liar and a hypocrite!!** Therefore, loving God is not just saying, “I love God.” It is easy to say but much harder to do. You cannot love God and not love others. The absence of love for one another shows an absence of love for God, regardless of what we claim. There's no room for prejudice, bigotry, racism, bias, or anything like it in the heart and mind of one who is attached to Jesus.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE COMMAND TO LOVE EACH OTHER IS A COMMAND NOT A REQUEST. WE MUST DO IT BECAUSE GOD SAYS IT'S WHAT WE MUST DO. (V 21)

“And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” (V 21) We cannot say we love and ***not*** do the things that show we truly love. In the same way, we cannot say we love God but not love one another because loving one another is how we show we love God. This is the powerful conclusion about love that John wants us to see. Perhaps the words of a popular song written by Peter Scholtes sums it up well, ***“We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, And we pray that our unity will one day be restored, And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love.”*** We have to fight for love, and we engage in the fight by focusing our minds and hearts on Jesus and showing love to others. If you are a true follower of Jesus, there's no room for bias, racism or discrimination.

Week of January 4– January 10, 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

JANUARY EMPHASIS: SHARING LOVE AND ESTABLISHING UNITY IN THE KINGDOM

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that we should exemplify God’s love and work across social barriers to build bridges of unity and hope.

WORDS: Love, Harmony, Compassion, Unity

LESSON TWO: WE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Does your behavior change when you are approached by someone of a different race?
2. Do you see your brothers and sisters as equals socially and in the Kingdom ?
3. Do you feel that others have an advantage in the Kingdom because of their race or gender?

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:25-29

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE SECOND STEP IN TEARING DOWN SOCIAL DIVISIONS AND BUILDING BRIDGES IS TO RECEIVE GOD’S LOVE AND APPLY IT TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

INTRODUCTION: Last week we discussed how God has commanded us to love one another because He first loved us. As we continue with our lessons on sharing love and establishing unity in the Kingdom, our focus today is on the second step in tearing down social divisions and building bridges. In this lesson, the Apostle Paul writes to the Gentiles in the church at Galatia emphasizing that they must seize every opportunity to receive each other as equals in God’s Kingdom. The church today often wrestles with this idea, often preaching it, but just as often **NOT** practicing it. Sadly, some members still look down on others with haughty and arrogant attitudes, and some boldly proclaim that “**their**” church is for a certain kind of people; the doors truly aren’t open to everybody. Such an attitude is society driven and not God ordained. We are commanded, not just to accept each other as brothers and sisters, but to receive each other as equals in the Kingdom. This is an important step in establishing unity.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT WE ARE EXPECTED TO BEHAVE IN A MANNER THAT SHOWS THAT WE HAVE CLOTHED OURSELVES IN CHRIST. (VV 26-27)

Paul teaches the Galatians that receiving Christ was special and unique, that the relationship they establish in the faith freed them to not succumb to social divisions, not to be blinded to the fact that the church should be open to all who repent, and that acceptance must not be based on where that person was in society. He makes it clear that they were no longer under the old way, ***“Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. (Verse 25 NIV)*** The guardian he refers to is the Law. **The NLT** puts it this way, ***“And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.”*** Just as they were free of the old ways that held them in custody and often justified social division, this new faith has torn down the old ways. Accepting Christ was not predicated on them having to look like or be like anybody else. The new way is based on a justification by faith that was revealed with Christ’s coming. ***“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (VV 26-27 NIV)*** The Kingdom of God provides no support for the idea that you can be a Christian and not accept your brothers and sisters as equals in the Kingdom. It was a good Word then and it is a good Word for us today.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT WE ARE EXPECTED TO SEE OUR FELLOW BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN A SPIRIT OF UNITY THAT SHOWS WE ARE ALL EQUALS IN THE KINGDOM. (V 28)

Paul assures the believers that, in Christ, they have been fully united with everyone else who is in Christ. There are no lesser Christians in the family of God. Our earthly identifiers create no value distinction between us in our Father's eyes. Jews do not carry a higher rank than Greeks (non-Jews). Whites don’t hold a greater position than blacks or any other ethnicity. Free people hold no greater honor than slaves. Men are not superior to women. No race is a "master race," nor any ethnicity inferior. ***“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (V 28 NIV)*** Perhaps **The NLT** is even clearer: ***“There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*** How is this possible? Christ holds the most honored position in the family of God, and all Christians are ***“in Christ.”*** In that way, we are one, and we are united, whether we like it or not!!

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT WE ARE THE BENEFICIARIES OF A DIVINE INHERITANCE THAT IS AVAILABLE TO ALL WHO BELONG TO CHRIST. (V 29)

“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (V 29) Anyone and everyone who belongs to Christ by faith is a beneficiary of the promise because we are joint heirs in the Kingdom. What was the promise? God promised Abraham that ***“all nations will be blessed through him.”*** This divine inheritance is for all who belong to Christ. Each has received an equal share of the inheritance. All Kingdom citizens have the same position in Christ regardless of their race, social class, and gender. They are all born again, justified, forgiven, redeemed, adopted, children of God, spiritually alive in Christ, new creations, in God’s spiritual kingdom, citizens of heaven, seated with Christ, sealed with the Holy Spirit, and headed for heaven. Each also has eternal life and peace with God. ***So no one has an advantage in the Kingdom of God because of their race, social class, or gender.*** We must see and accept each other as equals in God’s Kingdom.

Week of January 11– January 17 , 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

JANUARY EMPHASIS: SHARING LOVE AND ESTABLISHING UNITY IN THE KINGDOM

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that we should exemplify God’s love and work across social barriers to build bridges of unity and hope.

WORDS: Love, Harmony, Compassion, Unity

LESSON THREE: SHOWING MERCY AND COMPASSION

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Do you feel it is your personal responsibility to try and build unity in the church?
2. What have you done to break the barriers that divide the “black” church and the “white” church in your community?
3. Do you feel that you cannot attend another church because they don’t worship like your church?

TEXT: ZACHARIAH 7:8-10

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE THIRD STEP IN TEARING DOWN SOCIAL DIVISIONS AND BUILDING BRIDGES IS TO RECEIVE GOD’S LOVE AND APPLY IT TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

INTRODUCTION: In our last two lessons, we examined steps to build unity in the Kingdom by practicing love and seeing each other as equals in the Kingdom. Today, we examine step three: learning to show true mercy and kindness. It is easy to show outward religion by acting in a way that impresses other people with how “religious” we look. As Kingdom citizens must learn to always examine our motives for what we do for the Lord. Some self-examination questions that we should ask are: **Am I doing it from pride or self-righteousness? Am I seeking status or the applause of others? Am I trying to work off or cover up guilt for my sin, as if my activities can balance out or hide my sin? Am I trying to impress God with my activity so that He will give me something that I want from Him?** We must accept that our only proper motive should be to please and glorify God. In a lesson from the Old Testament book of the prophet Zachariah, we learn that God expects us to practice true religion by treating others well and by showing mercy and compassion.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THEY SHOULD NOT GET HUNG UP ON THEIR OWN SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS WHILE NEGLECTING THE NEEDS OF THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. (V 8)

Zechariah rebuked the people of God for becoming comfortable with just “looking”

religious. They were doing religious rituals and practices such as fasting, but being disobedient to caring for their neighbors. In essence, they were being disobedient to what God wanted them to do. His message came straight from God, ***“This is what the Lord Almighty said.”*** (V 8) He described the kind of obedience God wanted beginning with decent and loving treatment of one’s neighbor. We’re prone to doing the same thing today. Many Christians get hung up on keeping rules and rituals that the Bible does not command while they neglect dealing with their own hearts before God. They judge other Christians by outward appearance, by the color of their skin, by the neighborhood they came from or live in, and by their social standing. Yet they tolerate serious sins, such as pride, gossip, and greed in their own hearts. They have a litmus test for politicians they want to support and a condemnation of the ones they don’t want to support. They think God is either a Democrat or a Republican, a conservative or a liberal. They have their lists of behaviors that make you either a **“spiritual”** Christian or a **“worldly”** Christian. Some among the people of God find it easier to fast a few days, take communion on time, appear pious in public, shout hallelujah, and that’s all!! These things aren’t wrong, but God requires much more!! Just going to church won’t do it! Zachariah makes it clear that their bad relationship with others demonstrated a fundamentally bad relationship with the LORD.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THEY MUST TAKE INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE HEALING AND HARMONY IN A DIVIDED WORLD BY SHOWING COMPASSION FOR OTHERS. (VV 8-9)

The prophet reminds us that it is time for another spiritual health checkup. Outward religion without inward reality with God leads to spiritual hardening of the heart. This had happened to the ancestors of the remnant in Zechariah’s day, and it is happening to the church today. It presents a strong impediment to unity in the Kingdom. To be real with ourselves, we must realize that we live in a divided world and that a part of our divided world is a divided church. Kindness and compassion have been tossed out the window. We must realize that we can not be the church without executing mission. We should not be comfortable with disunity. According to Zachariah, the message from God is clear, ***“dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother.”*** Sadly, too many people are comfortable looking religious, but have no sense of mission. They go through all the motions to appear religious, yet their motives aren’t right. They keep their Christian smiles in place, but inwardly they’re resisting God.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THEY SHOULD STRIVE TO MOVE BEYOND RITUALS AND CONCENTRATE ON MAKING UNITY A PRIORITY. (V 10)

God saw through the hearts of the people just like He sees our hearts. Outwardly, they went to church and went through the religious rituals, but inwardly they were tolerating sin and not walking in reality with God. Zachariah further reminded them that they should ***“not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor.”*** They should not ***“devise evil in their hearts against one another”*** (7: 9-10). We must move beyond the rituals and show real compassion to our brothers and sisters. By doing so, we move closer to restoring unity in the Kingdom.

Week of January 18– January 24, 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

**JANUARY EMPHASIS: SHARING LOVE AND ESTABLISHING UNITY
IN THE KINGDOM**

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that we should exemplify God’s love and work across social barriers to build bridges of unity and hope.

WORDS: Love, Harmony, Compassion, Unity

LESSON FOUR: LIVING IN HARMONY WITH EACH OTHER

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Have you ever found yourself in conflict with a fellow church member?
2. When conflict arises, are you willing to take the initiative to resolve it?
3. Do you feel a genuine family relationship with your fellow church members?

TEXT: ROMANS 12:15-18

**THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE
FOURTH STEP IN TEARING DOWN SOCIAL DIVISIONS AND BUILDING
BRIDGES IS TO RECEIVE GOD’S LOVE AND APPLY IT TO OUR BROTHERS
AND SISTERS.**

INTRODUCTION: This week we turn our focus to the fourth step in our efforts to tear down divisions and build bridges in the Kingdom of God. Please review the first three steps as outlined in our prior lessons. As Kingdom citizens, we should endeavor to live in peace with one another and conduct our lives aiming for what is noble, honest and proper. Even though we cannot be responsible for the behaviors of others, we must strive to live in peace with each other as much as we can. Unity and disunity cannot peacefully co-exist - not in your home, your community or your church. Our lesson today is from Paul’s letter to the church in Rome. In chapter twelve, Paul provides a list of bullet commands to help insure harmonious relationships. The unifying theme of the list is setting ourselves aside to effectively love and serve the Lord, each other, and even our enemies. Our goal as Christians is to love and lift each other up. This is an important step in the unity process.

**1.KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT TO PRESERVE UNITY IN THE
KINGDOM OUR ACTIONS MUST BE MOTIVATED BY GENUINE LOVE.**
(VV 14-15)

Paul begins by saying our love for God and each other must not be faked. It's not a performance. He writes that everything we do must be motivated by genuine love. We must strive to establish that special bond that binds us together as brothers and sisters. To that end, we should *“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”* **(V15)** In times of happiness and in times of sadness, we share each other’s ups

and downs, and we should be happy to become a support system to each other. True love is best expressed this way. How wonderful it is when we use our spiritual gifts to serve each other. Just as God does, we must learn to hate what is evil and to hold on tight to what is good. This is accomplished in our lives by the transformation that occurs when we renew our minds to the Word of God. The community of the church is strengthened when we strive to be on one accord. The terms “brother” and “sister” become real in our relationships with each other.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT WE MUST STRIVE TO LIVE IN HARMONY WITH OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS REGARDLESS OF SOCIAL STATUS. (VV 16-17)

Paul also says that we should strive to ***“Live in harmony with one another.” (V 16)*** He warns us, ***“Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” (V 16)*** The NLT emphasizes that people of low position means ***“ordinary people”***. One of the reasons Christianity attracted so many followers in its early days was that women, slaves, and people of low social standing were all welcome to come to faith in Christ. The result was that people who would never associate anywhere else in Roman culture found themselves in relationship with each other in the church. Paul commands those on the upper levels of society to leave any class rivalry out of the church. This is a lesson to us today. While we say ***“whosoever will, let him come”*** and come just as you are, we must also say that when you come, it is expected that you will leave the trappings of division—sexism, racism and classism—behind. He also teaches that we must ***“not repay anyone evil for evil.” (V 17)*** Our genuine love makes us peace makers and not peace breakers. In **Matthew 5:9**, Jesus taught, ***“Blessed Are The Peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.”*** This should be a characteristic of every true believer today. Divisions in our society should not stop us from being united in the body of Christ.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT TO PRESERVE UNITY IN THE KINGDOM, THEY MUST HANDLE CONFLICT WITH THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN A GODLY WAY. (V 18)

Paul continues by acknowledging that there will be times of conflict no matter how hard we strive to live in peace. He encourages us to be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ***“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”.*** (V 18) Paul also reminds us not to repay evil for the evil done to us. This does not mean that we should seek to please mankind; rather it means that we should live righteously according to God's principles in plain view of everyone. The more we understand God's grace toward us, the more likely we are to also extend grace when wronged. Paul gives two clear conditions: ***“If possible”*** and ***“so far as it depends on you.”*** This command recognizes that conflict is sometimes unavoidable. Some people are just not interested in making peace with others. There is such a thing as an appropriate time and place to disagree, to dispute, or even to fight. When we align our thoughts and philosophies to what the Bible says, then we will see these things manifest in our lives.

Week of January 25– January 31, 2020

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

JANUARY EMPHASIS: SHARING LOVE AND ESTABLISHING UNITY IN THE KINGDOM

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that we should exemplify God’s love and work across social barriers to build bridges of unity and hope.

WORDS: Love, Harmony, Compassion, Unity

LESSON FIVE: GOD LOOKS ON THE INSIDE

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Do you tend to make judgments of people solely by their looks?
2. Have you ever felt negatively judged because of the color of your skin?
3. Do you strive to see the good in everyone regardless of outer appearance?

TEXT: EXODUS 12:3-13

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THE FIFTH STEP IN TEARING DOWN SOCIAL DIVISIONS AND BUILDING BRIDGES IS TO RECEIVE GOD’S LOVE AND APPLY IT TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

INTRODUCTION: It is a well known adage that looks can be deceiving. In spite of efforts to instill broad acceptance and understanding, it’s hard to fight the natural human tendency to base our thoughts on appearance. God created many races and ethnicities with many different physical characteristics. All are precious and beautiful in His sight. Sadly, the outer appearance has been the foundation of prejudice and bias in our society and even in the church. Unfortunately, the color of one’s skin or how he or she looks is often used by many persons to judge the quality and the worth of another and has been a factor in whether someone gets a job, a promotion, a club membership, approval for a loan, or fair housing. Like it or not, skin color has been a contributing factor to disunity within society and in the church. In today’s lesson, God gives instruction to look beyond the outer appearance. In this lesson, we address the fifth step in tearing down walls and building bridges by examining what God says in an incident occurring in I Samuel 16.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT GOD INTENDED FOR EVERYONE TO BE UNIQUE AND BEAUTIFUL IN HIS OR HER OWN WAY.

In this lesson, we see a new king selected by God, and a reminder of what God cares about most. Saul was Israel’s first king. The Bible described him as a very handsome man, taller by a head and shoulders than most of his contemporaries. He was a very gifted and courageous man, but God was removing him. He was rejected by God from

being king, not because he lacked courage nor because he lacked intelligence or leadership or appeal. God rejected Saul because of his disobedience. In this Scripture, we see that the Lord had commissioned Samuel to look for Saul's replacement. When he arrived at Jesse's house, Samuel saw Jesse's son Eliab and from first sight thought, **"Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before me."** (V 6) Samuel made the same mistake that we make. He just looked. Then he made a conclusion by sight alone. How many times have we just looked and made a snap judgement about an individual based on sight alone?

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT WHAT GOD IS LOOKING FOR TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM ARE PEOPLE WITH SINCERE HEARTS.

(V 7)

"But the LORD said to Samuel, Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him." (V 7) There is a great lesson here. When Samuel had anointed Saul as king, it was his tall stature and good looks that caught the prophet's attention and yet Saul turned out to be a real disappointment because his heart was not pure before the Lord. As this messenger of God came to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be God's chosen king, we see Samuel once again judging the quality of Israel's future king by his outward appearance and not by the inner attitude and motive of his heart. Thank goodness the Lord doesn't see people the way man sees them. People judge by outward appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart. **"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."** We must be very careful about judging people solely on outer appearance. How a person looks, slanty eyes, thick lips, blotchy skin, dreadlocks, enchanting smiles, crooked teeth have never been, should never be a litmus test for getting into heaven. Do you or your church consciously or unconsciously apply an appearance test before accepting someone as a fellow brother or sister? Perhaps you should take time to communicate and interact with them because through such interactions the heart is revealed. Appearances can indeed be very deceptive. It is the one who trusts the Lord and acts upon His Word that pleases the Lord.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT WHILE LOOKING BEYOND THE OUTER APPEARANCE THEY MUST EXAMINE THEIR OWN HEARTS AND ASK GOD TO TAKE AWAY ANY MALICE, BIGOTRY AND BIAS. (VV 12-13)

God saw that David, though very young and with only experience of looking after sheep, was right in His sight. He saw that David had spiritual character. This is what God is looking for in you and in me - spiritual character. To build unity in the Kingdom, we also must examine our own hearts and ask God to remove any impediment that causes us to see only the outer appearance. We must ask Him to help us, **"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger"** (Ephesians 4:31) that blinds us. The problem could be that we can't see straight!! As Kingdom citizens, we must learn to cultivate love for one another which transcends outer appearance. Cultivate fellowship. Don't make yourself a stranger to the Lord's people; they are your brothers and sisters.

Week of February 1– February 7, 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

FEBRUARY EMPHASIS: BUILDING BRIDGES AND CREATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS RACIAL LINES

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that we should reach across barriers of racial and ethnic differences to break every yoke of division and to promote unity in the Kingdom for all persons regardless of their social status.

WORDS: Building, Relationships, Race, Ethnicity, Foreigner

LESSON SIX: WE ARE ALL CREATED BY GOD

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?
2. Is there a difference between being prejudiced and being racist?
3. How important is diversity to you, and what value does it bring?

TEXT: GENESIS 1:27-28

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT IN THIS INCREASINGLY INTERCONNECTED WORLD, LEARNING OPENNESS AND APPRECIATING RACIAL DIFFERENCES ARE NECESSARY FOR ADVANCING THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

INTRODUCTION: There has been a lot of attention given to the topic of race relations over the years. Unfortunately, our nation, and indeed the world, has seen many conflicts based on racial relations. Racists come in all colors. Even the church has been a player in this conflict, sometimes as a unifier but often as a catalyst for the division. Scripture has been wrongly interpreted as supporting racial separation and even providing justification for slavery. **Is racial separation of God?** Some parents openly practice racism and teach it as acceptable to their children, thereby developing a new generation of racists. **Did God create us to be racists?** To understand the worth of every person, it is fitting to look at how God created man. Our lesson today comes from the book of Genesis at the moment in time when God created man. Kingdom citizens must be watchful and take every opportunity to focus on what is similar between ourselves and others and accept our racial differences as positive rather than negative.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT WE WERE ALL CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD. (V 26)

The first chapter of the book of Genesis tells the story of God creating the world. It continues by telling the story of God creating man. We learn that God said, *“Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.”* (V 26) What does it mean

that mankind was created *“in the image of God”*? Contrary to some teachings, it does not mean that God has a head, two arms, and two legs like us. Being made in the *“image of God”* means that we have minds, emotions and wills just as God has a mind, emotions, and a will. He created us to be like him in these ways, and He instilled in us a universal quality to positively function in spite of our differences. He is the source of what we find in us. All creation displays God’s design, power, and goodness, but only human beings are said to be made in God’s image. **God is not racist, so humans, who claim to be made in his image, cannot be like Him and be racist at the same time.** God allowed our diversity so that we can see and appreciate the worth of our differences.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT OUR DIVERSITY SHOULD BE CELEBRATED AND APPRECIATED. (V 27)

Biblically, the starting point to understanding ourselves is to recognize that, male or female, we are made in God’s image. *“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (V 27)* Being *“made in God’s image”* also explains our moral capability. We understand what ‘wrong’ attitude and behavior are and what ‘good’ attitude and behavior are, even though human languages and cultures are very different. All are a part of God’s design, all in His image or likeness. **No race is excluded!! No race is superior!!** The way we deal with and handle diversity will impact our communities and our world and most certainly the Kingdom! We must note that diversity came from our Creator. God Himself is diverse! God is one but exists in three Persons: God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit **UNITED** as One! A diverse God decided to create human beings in His own image. Although we may be different races of people, we all came from One God! We should strive to be united even though we are different from each other. This is cause for great celebration!

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT GOD DOES NOT WANT OUR DIVERSITY TO BE A BAR TO UNITY.

Diversity is about learning to accept people from all different cultures, backgrounds, and races for the beautiful uniqueness that makes everyone an important part of the community. Kingdom citizens must accept that no matter who we are, where we’ve come from, the type of food we eat, how we dance, and how we speak, **God’s desire is that we be united in Him!** Gathering regularly to worship God is a good way to celebrate unity through diversity. God speaks to us through His Word, and His Word is based on His love!! Kingdom citizens must take a clear, public and zero tolerance stance against racism or discrimination because racism and discrimination of any kind by anyone and toward anyone is unacceptable in the Kingdom. We are to challenge the world, the church and the unchurched, to accept our differences and diversity and not allow our diversity to be a bar to our unity. The more we understand each other and treat each other with dignity and respect, the stronger we will be, and the stronger God’s Kingdom will be in this challenging world.

Week of February 8– February 14, 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

FEBRUARY EMPHASIS: BUILDING BRIDGES AND CREATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS RACIAL LINES

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that we should reach across barriers of racial and ethnic differences to break every yoke of division and to promote unity in the Kingdom for all persons regardless of their social status.

WORDS: Building, Relationships, Race, Ethnicity, Foreigner

LESSON SEVEN: BEING KIND TO FOREIGNERS

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Do you hesitate to show hospitality to foreigners?
2. Do you allow the government to shape your attitudes toward immigrants?
3. Do you find it difficult to love someone who has immigrated from a foreign land?

TEXT: LEVITICUS 19:33-34

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT WE HAVE A MORAL RESPONSIBILITY TO WALK ALONGSIDE IMMIGRANTS AND WELCOME THEM TO THE KINGDOM.

INTRODUCTION: The issue of immigration is a hot topic for our nation today. The rise of civil unrest, extreme violence, and the need for better economic opportunity have caused increasing numbers of people to leave their homelands to seek safety and a secure future for their children elsewhere. Many people resent these foreigners for coming into “our” country, taking “our” jobs and using up “our” resources. Some governments have taken tough stances against immigrants, **but what should be the attitude of Kingdom citizens to these strangers (most of different races and ethnicities) who are trying to enter “our” land?** Today, our nation has developed harsh, inhospitable policies toward foreigners from “certain” countries. Walls are being built, families are being separated, and children are being taken away from their parents at the border. Yet, we still have the nerve to proclaim that we are one nation under God. **So what are we as Kingdom citizens to do? And what did God say to Israel about immigrants?** An answer is found in the Old Testament book of Leviticus.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT THE ATTITUDE OF THE GOVERNMENT TOWARD IMMIGRANTS IS NOT NECESSARILY THE ATTITUDE THAT THEY SHOULD TAKE.

There is an ancient Jewish proverb which says, “*Hospitality is a form of worship*”. The apostle Peter taught the believers to “*Be hospitable to one another without grumbling* (1 Pet. 4:9). Paul advised Titus that a good bishop would be “hospitable, a love of what

is good” (Titus 1:8), and he wrote to the Romans that they should be “*given to hospitality*” (Rom. 12:13). In our text, the Israelites were commanded to give encouragement to the strangers that settled among them, so that they might be brought to the knowledge and worship of the true God. They were to treat them not as aliens, but as friends. Leviticus 19:34 explains why: *“You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”* It was the purpose of Israel to introduce God and the correct worship of God to the world, as it is for Kingdom Citizens to do today. We are called upon to be kind to strangers which lets them know that the nation’s policy is not necessarily God’s biblical proclamation.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THE BIBLE IS UNAMBIGUOUS IN CALLING US TO WELCOME ALIENS AND STRANGERS IN OUR LAND AND TO LOVE THEM AS WE LOVE OURSELVES. (V 33)

The acceptance of immigrants into Israel was also evidence of God's caring character. Israel was supposed to be a land where people collectively obeyed Him, and He blessed the nation with prosperity in return. Other nations did not have this guarantee. *“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them.” (V 33)* Immigrants, who may have faced hardships or persecution at home, were welcome to take part of the common grace God bestowed on all of Israel. God cares about the aliens. *“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribes. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing”* (Deuteronomy 10:17-18). God commands His people to remain humble, recognizing that His love knows no boundaries. We are all strangers – travelers on life’s journey.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THEY MUST EXAMINE THEIR OWN HEARTS AND ASK GOD TO TAKE AWAY ANY MALICE, BIGOTRY, AND BIAS TOWARD IMMIGRANTS (V 34)

Leviticus teaches that the Israelites must not “oppress” resident foreigners (Lev. 19:33). (The same Hebrew verb appears in Lev. 25:17, *“You shall not cheat one another.”*) The command continues, *“The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (V. 34).* This verse is a particularly strong example of the unbreakable connection in Leviticus between the moral force of the law (“love the alien as yourself”) and the very being of God, *“I am the Lord your God.”* You do not oppress foreigners because you belong to a God who is holy. If a nation chooses to make immigration difficult for those fleeing hardship or persecution, that is within its rights, although it contradicts God's character. A stranger may be an unlikely friend waiting to be made or they may be an opportunity to worship God as you show hospitality to them. Christ has loved us, and in response, we are to love others. Hebrews 13:2: *“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels”.* God’s love knows no borders. We are to love others the way that we have been loved; nationality, race, and color do not matter to God nor should they matter to us.

Week of February 15- February 15, 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

FEBRUARY EMPHASIS: BUILDING BRIDGES AND CREATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS RACIAL LINES

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that we should reach across barriers of racial and ethnic differences to break every yoke of division and to promote unity in the Kingdom for all persons regardless of their social status.

WORDS: Building, Relationships, Race, Ethnicity, Foreigner

LESSON EIGHT: TEARING DOWN BARRIERS

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Do you find it hard to initiate a conversation with someone of a different race?
2. Have you ever considered traveling to another country to do the Lord's work?
3. Is harmony of the races necessary for the effective work of the Kingdom?

TEXT: JOHN 4:4-10

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT THEY SHOULD TAKE THE INITIATIVE TO REACH ACROSS RACIAL LINES AND NOT BE AFRAID TO CONFRONT THE MANY SOCIAL, RACIAL, AND ETHNIC BARRIERS THAT DIVIDE US. SOMETIMES THE FIRST STEP IS UP TO US.

INTRODUCTION: We are commanded in the great commission to go into all the world and teach all nations. (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20) This can be a challenging task because most church folk choose to live behind the comfortable walls of their houses, communities, and churches. In our lesson today, we find Jesus taking the initiative to go to an area where Jews were not very welcome, the land of Samaria. This is an amazing story, one which shows Christ teaching by example that we should challenge social taboos if necessary to carry the Word. Here was Jesus breaking through the barriers of nationality and orthodox Jewish custom to show the universality of the Gospel. We discover that our Lord did not hesitate to mingle with persons of mixed heritage, and neither should we.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT THEY MUST SEIZE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO MINGLE AND SHARE THE WORD OF GOD TO PERSONS OF DIFFERENT RACES. (VV 4-6)

The Samaritans were people who lived in what had been the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Samaria, the name of that kingdom's capital, was located between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. The Samaritans were *a racially mixed society* with Jewish and pagan ancestry. Although they worshiped Yahweh as did the Jews, their religion

was not mainstream Judaism. Because of their imperfect adherence to Judaism and their partly pagan ancestry, the Samaritans were despised by ordinary Jews. Samaritans also harbored antipathy toward the Jews. Rather than contaminate themselves by passing through Samaritan territory, Jews who were traveling from Judea to Galilee or vice versa would cross over the river Jordan, bypass Samaria by going through Transjordan, and cross over the river again as they neared their destination. Are there areas in your community that you purposely avoid because you have a low opinion of the people who live there? ***“Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.” (VV 4-5)*** Jesus was there, not by accident, but because the opportunity for ministry was great. He would not let social taboos or historical differences stand in the way.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW WE MUST NOT BE AFRAID TO MINGLE, SPEAK, AND WORSHIP WITH PERSONS OF OTHER RACES THEREBY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF EVERY MINISTRY OPPORTUNITY. (VV 7-9)

Jesus needed be there at the time when a certain Samaritan woman came alone to draw from the well. ***“When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)” (VV 7-9)*** In this situation we see our Lord’s true character – always mingling with folks from all walks of life everywhere he went, ministering to them, but mincing no words as He spoke the truth in love. Jesus was accessible, not too tired to engage in conversation with a Samaritan whose kinfolk had been historically despised by Jews; she was a woman who it was socially unacceptable to speak with in public because it was against Jewish custom. This woman was an outcast who was ostracized by her own folks. The fact that the Samaritans were separated from and looked down upon by the Jews did not make them unimportant to the Lord. There is room for everyone in the Kingdom. Jesus indicated a new attitude must be taken toward the Samaritans and for some of us a new attitude is necessary as we consider persons of different races. What a shame it would be if we failed to introduce a person to God simply because that person was of a different race from us.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THEY HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO TEACH AND DEMONSTRATE RACIAL HARMONY TO EACH OTHER BECAUSE OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM (V 10)

Having initiated the conversation, Jesus zeroes in on this ministry moment. ***“Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” (V 10)*** Jesus worked in this situation in which He a Jew and she a Samaritan were brought together by the will of God to reach and teach a sinner the most valuable lesson: The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, the Savior and the Lord of all who repent, believe and receive. The message for Kingdom citizens is clear: **We must acknowledge our humanity, make known our accessibility, demonstrate our amiability and practice our acceptability of whoever will confront a sinful lifestyle, change ways of thinking, and conform to God’s will.** We cannot allow racial differences or racist attitudes to get in the way of us doing the Lord’s work. The living water is for all of us to drink.

Week of February 22- February 28, 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

FEBRUARY EMPHASIS: BUILDING BRIDGES AND CREATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS RACIAL LINES

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that we should reach across barriers of racial and ethnic differences to break every yoke of division and to promote unity in the Kingdom for all persons regardless of their social status.

WORDS: Building, Relationships, Race, Ethnicity, Foreigner

LESSON NINE: THE KINGDOM IS FOR EVERYONE

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Do you allow cultural differences to prevent you from visiting another church?
2. Are you unaccepting of churches whose form of worship is different from yours?
3. If heaven is open to all believers of different races, do you still want to go?

TEXT: REVELATIONS 7:9-12

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT OUR BEST WAY TO SHOW RACIAL HARMONY IN THE KINGDOM COMES WITH US BEING UNITED IN PRAISE AND WORSHIP WITH PERSONS OF OTHER RACES.

INTRODUCTION: No matter who we are, where we've come from, the type of food we eat, how we look, and how we speak, God's desire is that we be united in Him! Gathering regularly to worship with persons of other races is a good way to celebrate our diversity and show our unity. The world needs to see the strength of Kingdom unity by the display of races coming together, united and focused on one goal: **worshipping God who is Lord of all**. We started this month in the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, and we learned that God created human beings in His own image and likeness. From the very beginning of life, each of us are born in unique families and cultures, in different places, learning different languages, of different races - we are diverse; but we all live in this same world under one God! From Genesis we now look to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, and we see how God reveals a glorious future for those who believe. We also see that the Kingdom goal of racial harmony through worship is fulfilled.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS LOOK WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION TO THE TIME WHEN WE CAN TRULY WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH. (VV 9-10)

In the future, in a place called heaven, people from every nation, tribe, culture, and language will be united with the Lamb worshiping God for eternity. This will be a wonderful moment that we should long for and strive to participate in. In Chapter 7,

John sees the ultimate culmination of our existence in heaven. There are people as far as the eye can see and farther beyond that. First, John saw and heard what 144,000 looked like in verses 1-8 and now he looks again and sees more. All he can say, in comparison, is that this is a **GREAT** crowd. ***“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” (VV 9-12)*** This crowd is great because of its size. This crowd is great because of its diversity. John makes clear that in this crowd he sees people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples, and languages. There are men and women in this crowd. There are boys and girls in this crowd. There are persons of all ethnicities, every race, and every color in the crowd. There are young and old, male and female, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. They are Black and White. They are English speaking, Spanish speaking, Arabic speaking, and Asian speaking. This is a greatly diverse crowd. There is unity in diversity at the beginning of life! There is unity in diversity in life eternal! **There should be unity in diversity today!!**

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT OUR GOAL TO BEING UNITED IN WORSHIP IN HEAVEN BEGINS WITH US BEING UNITED IN WORSHIP ON EARTH. (VV 10-11)

All of us, as diverse as we are, will be united forever if we believe in the Lamb! The Bible tells us that the Lamb is Jesus Christ who was slain but rose from the grave. **Why should we wait until we get to heaven to worship across racial lines when we have that opportunity while we are still on earth?** Their worship was genuine, intense and passionate. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: ***“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” (V 9)*** They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God. John notes that they are wearing white robes, which is symbolic of the fact that these have been forgiven of their sins, **(including their hatred, bigotry and racism)** which once stained their souls before God. Not everyone is included in this crowd. It is particularly composed of all the peoples of the earth who have been forgiven of their sins and consequently clothed with the white robes of righteousness. They know that the only reason they could have experienced this moment was because of their own personal repentance and because they had put away the things that divided them from each other on earth. They are proud to shout, ***“Praise and glory, wisdom and thanks, honor and power and strength to our God forever!” (V 11)*** Don't you want to be in this crowd? Yes, Lord!!

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THEY HAVE AN ASSURANCE OF LIFE ETERNAL WITH LIKE MINDED PERSONS OF EVERY RELIGION AND ETHNICITY IN THE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD. (V 11)

As we end the month of February, let us summarize what we need to remember to live out our diversity to bring unity: We are all created by God, and as we unite with our differences, we will see God more and more! We all are uniquely created by God; **own it!!** Therefore, when we look at other people, see God through them! Eternity in heaven will consist of diverse people who had faith in God through the Lamb Jesus Christ. Let us all personally and constantly think of and yield to God the Holy Spirit within us! **IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS! THE SINFULLY PREJUDICED, RACIST, AND ETHNOCENTRIC MIND HATES THIS SCENE IN HEAVEN AND RIGHTFULLY SO ONLY BECAUSE IT IS HIGHLY LIKELY THAT THEY WILL NOT BE A PART OF IT!!**

Week of March 1– March 7, 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

MARCH EMPHASIS: GETTING RIGHT WITH OURSELVES

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that true restoration of the Kingdom begins with a personal examination of self. We must start by recognizing our own prejudices and trust God to take us beyond selfishness and bias. We must be real with ourselves.

WORDS: Self-Examination, Prejudice, Favoritism, Selfishness

LESSON TEN: BEING TRUE WITH OURSELVES

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Have you ever searched your heart and performed a moral self-examination?
2. Do you tend to overlook your own faults while condemning and criticizing others?
3. Do you take great delight in finding faults in other persons?

TEXT: MATTHEW 7:1-5

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS SHOULD KNOW THAT THEY MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO PRONOUNCE JUDGMENT ON OTHERS WHILE IGNORING THEIR OWN MORAL SHORTCOMINGS.

INTRODUCTION: Today, we begin a new month by placing emphasis on ourselves. Kingdom citizens should regularly perform a candid and genuine spiritual and moral self-examination. We begin by addressing the topic of judging. In our society of so called "**tolerance,**" we are often struck with an opposition from people who cry that we have no right to judge them. In fact, we probably have even heard some go so far as to claim that "**Jesus never judged people; He even taught that we are not to judge!**" They quote and often misinterpret Matthew 7:1-5 in their attempts to convince others that Jesus has condemned all judging. Is this a correct interpretation of these verses? Should Kingdom citizens never judge? Are we to conveniently look away and acquiesce into accepting every behavior? Perhaps an examination of this text will provide the answer.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT THEY MUST AVOID BECOMING COMFORTABLE WITH AN ATTITUDE OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS. A PHARISEE ATTITUDE IS UNACCEPTABLE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD. (VV 1-2)

In the first two words of this passage, Jesus does tell us to "***Judge not, that you be not judged.***" (V1) This scripture has been perverted and twisted to teach that when one calls the actions of another error and expresses that continuance in such ways will condemn

the soul, that individual is judging, which is supposedly "condemned" in the Bible. But from the context of this passage, what judging is forbidden? Is it judging that makes a distinction between right and wrong? Is there never a time and place for seeing and reprimanding a fault? If we take a look at the context of these verses, it may help to pinpoint the nature of the wrong judgment that Jesus is condemning. The group that set the standard of righteousness in Jewish society in Christ's day and were well known as the leading judges-of-others were the Pharisees. Jesus had earlier said that the standard of righteousness for His disciples was not to be like that of the Pharisees. He had already declared in Matthew 5:20: ***"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*** The kind of righteousness the Pharisees had was not real righteousness before God; it was self-righteousness. Luke 18:19 describes their righteousness this way, ***"They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others."*** Jesus is now teaching that we are not to act in the self-righteous, judgmental way that the Pharisees did. ***"For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."*** (V2)

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT BEFORE CONDEMNING OTHERS, WE MUST EXAMINE OUR OWN BEHAVIORS AND CORRECT OUR OWN SHORTCOMINGS. (VV 3-5)

If we take the view that judging is completely and totally forbidden, then it would commit us to neutrality on all moral issues and that is the very opposite of the stance Christ wants us to take. What many fail to realize is that Jesus taught that we are given the right and responsibility to make judgments in order to help our fellow man with their problem of sin, provided we have first ***"remove the plank from our own eye."*** Jesus expects you to be able to see clearly so that you can ***"remove the speck from your brother's eye."*** (V5) In our text, Jesus is forbidding the judging that is for the purpose of putting down others to exalt one's self. This is what the Pharisees did. It is the habit of finding fault in others when really there are more faults within yourself. How can you expect to help a person with a few transgressions when you are overwhelmed with sin yourselves? Jesus simply teaches that we ought to first examine ourselves. Let us remove the plank in our own eye. We must conduct a candid self-examination of our own behavior. Then, and only then, can we see clearly to remove the speck in our brother's eye.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT JESUS WARNS US NOT TO HAVE A BITTER, HYPERCRITICAL, FAULT FINDING SPIRIT.

Are there still Pharisees among us today? Have you encountered any? Do you have a Pharisee spirit? The teaching of Jesus in this passage is concerned with the attitude of a man, not a complete absence of our judgment. Christ is not permitting us to avoid making hard decisions or taking difficult stands. He is warning us not to have a bitter, hypercritical, fault finding spirit. As God's children, although we must be cautious in our judgments concerning ourselves and others, we cannot ignore our Lord's commands that instruct us to make judgments. Remember when you are tempted to judge the sins you see in your brothers, that it is usually a very small matter compared to the sinfulness God sees in you. We must be true with ourselves. Check yourself first!

Week of March 8– March 14, 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

MARCH EMPHASIS: GETTING RIGHT WITH OURSELVES

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that true restoration of the Kingdom begins with a personal examination of self. We must start by recognizing our own prejudices and trust God to take us beyond selfishness and bias. We must be real with ourselves.

WORDS: Self-Examination, Prejudice, Favoritism, Selfishness

LESSON ELEVEN: DID YOU FAIL THE TEST?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Have you ever felt that you are losing your spiritual connection with God?
2. Do you still believe what you believed when you first accepted Christ as Lord?
3. What evidence do you have that the Holy Spirit is still working in your life?

TEXT: II CORINTHIANS 13:5-6

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT THEY SHOULD REGULARLY PERFORM CANDID SPIRITUAL SELF-EXAMINATIONS AND MAKE ANY CORRECTIONS NECESSARY FOR MAINTAINING A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.

INTRODUCTION: In last week's lesson, we examined whether Kingdom Citizens should judge one another. We concluded that every Kingdom citizen must be careful to not look beyond their own moral shortcomings. In this lesson, we continue with our monthly emphasis of getting right with ourselves with a passage from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth. Here we see Paul emphasizing the need for us to examine ourselves. We are taught to put ourselves to the test to determine if Christ is truly in us. Everyone of us should regularly perform a spiritual self-examination. To advance the Kingdom, we should look into our hearts and sincerely address this question: **Is my spiritual connection still strong?** We cannot be right with God until we have looked within our own hearts and tested ourselves.

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST BE CERTAIN THAT THEIR SPIRITUAL BATTERIES ARE STRONGLY CONNECTED TO GOD, OUR ULTIMATE POWER SOURCE. WE MUST REGULARLY CHECK OUR CONNECTION.

(V 5)

The apostle Paul gave the directive to *“test yourselves”* while dealing with serious problems of sin in the church of Corinth. He was preparing to return to them a third time after having spent a great deal of time earlier. He sternly cautioned the congregation to prepare to face the issues he had previously raised. Part of Paul's

Warning included these words: ***“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves...”*** (V5) This statement gives a crucial perspective to all Kingdom citizens; we must think critically about our own walk with Christ. The Corinthians had sought proof that Christ was speaking through Paul as an apostle (2 Corinthians 13:3). They wanted proof of Paul’s connection to Christ, but Paul flips the script on them. Instead of being concerned about his connection, he instructs them to examine themselves. Are they truly in the faith? Biblical faith involves cautious skepticism; it means being honest and careful about looking into our own lives. It is an invitation for us to be spiritually true to ourselves. Examining oneself spiritually includes an honest look at whether one is truly a believer in Jesus. Along with that, it calls for Kingdom citizens to examine the details and results of their faith to see if it's according to the truth. It involves scrutinizing one's own conduct to see if and how he or she follows through on the will of God for their lives. We must maintain a healthy connection to the ultimate spiritual power source—our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If our connection is shaky, we need to tighten it up!!

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT IF WE ARE NOT CONSCIOUSLY CONNECTED TO THE CHRIST THAT IS WITHIN US, THEN WE HAVE FAILED THE TEST. (V 5)

Paul assumed a positive response. His hope was that by understanding Christ's presence within them, the Corinthians would be motivated to shun sin. It also implies their honest answer - that Christ is in them. He provided them with a direct challenge by asking them to examine and test themselves to see whether they were in the faith. We, too, must meet this challenge. Paul’s primary concern was to bring spiritual health and wholeness to the Kingdom. Scripture calls us to ***“test everything,”*** renounce evil, and ***“hold fast what is good.”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:21–22 ESV) If they were genuinely in the faith, then they would know that Jesus Christ lived inside them. Paul asked, ***“Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-unless, of course, you fail the test?”*** His Holy Spirit would be at work within them promoting sanctification and moral living. If their lives showed no evidence of the Spirit’s activity, then Jesus Christ was not indwelling them. If Christ was not in them, they failed the test.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT GOD IS ALWAYS READY TO RECONNECT WITH US. (V 6)

Paul finished on a positive note, ***“And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.”*** Rather than cross-examining others, believers are to stick to examining their own lives. A tough but spiritually beneficial question to ask ourselves regularly is ***“What is my spiritual condition?”*** The prophet Jeremiah called God’s people to honest self-evaluation and repentance: ***“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.”*** (Lamentations 3:40) We might consider making this our prayer as David did: ***“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*** (Psalm 139:23–24) Our closing question today is **Have you examined your heart and did you pass the test?**

Week of March 15– March 21, 2021

KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

MARCH EMPHASIS: GETTING RIGHT WITH OURSELVES

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that true restoration of the Kingdom begins with a personal examination of self. We must start by recognizing our own prejudices and trust God to take us beyond selfishness and bias. We must be real with ourselves.

WORDS: Self-Examination, Prejudice, Favoritism, Selfishness

LESSON TWELVE: NO FAVORITISM IN THE KINGDOM

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Do you seek to associate with particular church groups based on outer appearance?
2. Do you base your popularity on which group you associate with in the church?
3. Do you believe that the act of playing favorites in the church is a sin?

TEXT: JAMES 2:1-7

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT THEY SHOULD STRIVE TO RESPECT EVERYONE IN THE KINGDOM REGARDLESS OF OUTER APPEARANCE.

INTRODUCTION: It is a dangerous thing to allow favoritism to develop in the body of Christ. Playing favorites has caused a lot of people pain and heartache. It has caused many Kingdom citizens to backslide or to become disillusioned in their faith. This has caused many in the church to push against each other in order to be accepted into the favored group. Division sets in as those who considered themselves to be the favored ones begin to shun, look down on and humiliate those who are not recognized as equal ministry partners. Many church ministries have been rendered ineffective because of favoritism. **Have you checked yourself to see if you are practicing favoritism in the body?** It is time for another self-examination. God has given us a command to treat all of His children with the same respect and to honor them all in the same way. In this lesson, we look at a Scripture from the book of James that addresses the issue of showing favoritism in the body of Christ. **Does this apply to you? Getting right with ourselves includes avoiding favoritism.**

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT SHOWING PARTIALITY PUTS MAN AS JUDGE IN PLACE OF GOD. (V 1)

The fact that James specifically addresses the sin of favoritism implies that this was a common problem within the early church. Favoritism is a problem we still deal with today. Favoritism and partiality are not from God. Kingdom citizens are called to love one another. James begins by telling the believers that favoritism is displeasing to the Lord. *“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious LORD Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.” (V 1)* He illustrates this point with a hypothetical scenario. Two

men come into a church gathering. One is obviously wealthy as seen by his gold ring and fine clothes. The other is obviously poor as seen by his shabby clothes. Someone in the church directs the wealthy man to the best seat in the house, whereas the poor man is told to stand out of the way or to sit down on the floor. The rich man is given privileges because of his wealth, but the poor man is despised because of his poverty. Such treatment, James says is evil. This is not to be confused with the hospitality that is expected to be shown to visitors. Every Kingdom citizen needs to do a sincere self-evaluation to make sure they are not demonstrating favoritism within the Church body or within the ministries in which they serve.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT SHOWING PARTIALITY PUTS MAN IN A POSITION OF AUTHORITY THAT IS MEANT ONLY FOR GOD.

(VV 2-5)

James addresses the problem of favoritism in a powerful way. When we exalt men on account of their wealth or power or status, we steal glory from Jesus Christ who sovereignly gives us everything that we are and have. Rather than exalting the rich or any other persons within the body, we should exalt the supreme glory of Christ alone. Regardless of social status, we all are just His unworthy servants. Focusing on the glory of Christ puts us all in our proper place before Him. In verse 4, he says that when we make distinctions among people based on outward factors, we set ourselves up as judges of the worth of our brothers and sisters. ***“Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”*** To judge a man based on his outward appearance is to usurp the place of Jesus Christ in His glory as judge of all the earth. James is **NOT** saying that the rich are categorically bad, and the poor are categorically good. He is saying that any judgments based on outward factors alone are wrong judgments because they do not discern the heart, and only God can see the heart.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THEIR STATUS MAY NOT CHANGE BUT THEIR ATTITUDE MUST. (VV 6-7)

Then, James asks two rhetorical questions which are based on their current circumstances to show that by aligning themselves with the rich against the poor, they are contributing to divisions and cliques in the body. This destroys the unity of the Kingdom and impairs the work of missions. Sometimes the ones who are shown favoritism are the very ones who have looked down on you. ***“But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?”*** (VV 6-7) The church should show God’s love and grace to all, whether rich or poor. No one should be given preferential treatment in the Kingdom to the detriment of others, in an attempt to be in the right group or have the right influence. God chooses those who are saved apart from any merit or qualifications on the part of those chosen. **God plays no favorites, and neither should we.**

Week of March 22– March 28, 2021

**KINGDOM CITIZENS STRIVING TO
ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON
EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN**

MARCH EMPHASIS: GETTING RIGHT WITH OURSELVES

THOUGHT: Kingdom Citizens must know that true restoration of the Kingdom begins with a personal examination of self. We must start by recognizing our own prejudices and trust God to take us beyond selfishness and bias. We must be real with ourselves.

WORDS: Self-Examination, Prejudice, Favoritism, Selfishness

LESSON THIRTEEN: DON'T LET THE STONES CRY OUT FOR YOUR!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Have you ever had a moment that you burst out in spontaneous praise?
2. Have you ever felt that someone was deliberately trying to shut your praise down?
3. How do you respond when someone is trying to interfere with your praise?

TEXT: LUKE 19:37-40

THE HEART OF THE LESSON: KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT THEY SHOULD REMAIN STEADFAST, RESISTING THOSE WHO WILL TRY TO STOP US FROM PRAISING HIS NAME.

INTRODUCTION: Today is Palm Sunday. On this day, we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem which is one week before His resurrection. Palm branches symbolize victory and triumph over death. Palm Sunday is the feast that falls on the Sunday before Resurrection Sunday. It is the first day of Holy Week. Today, we consider the events of the first Palm Sunday as recorded in the gospel of Luke. We see Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowds honor Him. They take palm branches and go out to meet Him. They lay their cloaks in the road to honor Him. They shout "*Hosanna!*" which means "*Please, save!*" "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" His arrival is the fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in the book of Zechariah: "*See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey.*" (Zechariah 9:9 NIV) Jesus came to save and He accomplishes this by coming to Jerusalem to die for all sinners, including you and me. He came to carry our sins to the cross and take our place by becoming our substitute. He came to satisfy divine justice for us. He came to reveal grace and mercy to us all. Here, we have a powerful praise moment!

1. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST KNOW THAT ON THIS PALM SUNDAY, WE SHOULD CELEBRATE WITH SHOUTS OF PRAISE FOR THE GREAT SACRIFICE OUR LORD MADE FOR US. (VV 37-38)

As Jesus descends from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen. A large crowd had gathered for the Passover Feast.

Excitement and enthusiasm was in the air. Voices of praise were lifted up in unison: **"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the LORD!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (VV 37-38)** They began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; this was calling to mind the many miracles He had wrought in Galilee, at Cana, at Capernaum, and other places. They remembered how as he passed through Judea, he had restored sight to the blind, and especially the miracle he had recently done at Bethany - raising Lazarus from the dead. Being filled with joy and gladness at the remembrance of these things, they lifted up their voices with shouts and acclamations of praise.

2. KINGDOM CITIZENS MUST RESIST THOSE WHO SEEK TO HINDER THEIR PRAISE. (V 39)

In the midst of this joyous moment at a time when the Spirit of God is at its highest, the naysayers rise up. Have you ever experienced someone trying to kill the joy of your praise? Perhaps, it is a close friend or loved one who looks and shakes their head with an attitude of contempt. You can see them looking at you with a condescending attitude telling you **"it doesn't take all of that!"** Shamefully, they don't have a genuine praise, but are eager to shut your praise down!! Such was the case with the Pharisees. The Word tells us, **"Some of the Pharisees from the multitude said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"** In other words, stop the praise!! All along, the Pharisees had taken offense with Jesus—with His claim to forgive sins (5:21); His friendship with tax collectors and sinners (5:30); His failure to require scrupulous observance of His disciples (5:33); and His healing on the sabbath (6:6-11). Now they take offense at Jesus' disciples saying, **"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"**—a saying appropriate only to the Messiah. They want to shut the praise down!! These Pharisees considered themselves the arbiters of proper religious conduct. They observed the law and felt responsible to insure that others did the same. Jesus is not behaving in accord with their understanding of the law, and they feel a responsibility to correct him—or stop him. These so-called religious leaders hated the attention Jesus was receiving, and they commanded Him to rebuke His disciples.

3. KINGDOM CITIZENS KNOW THAT THEY MUST NOT LET THE STONES CRY OUT IN THEIR PLACE; THEY MUST PRAISE JESUS FOR THEMSELVES. (V 40)

Instead Jesus rebuked them! **"He answered, "I tell you that if these were silent, the stones would cry out." (V40)** We are reminded that God can bring forth life from that which has no life. Everything in creation has to praise Him. **"Great is the LORD! He is most worthy of praise! No one can measure his greatness."** (Psalm 145:3) God inhabits the praises of his people. He is worthy of all our praise and honor because he is our Creator and Savior. When we praise Him, we let Him know that we understand who He is. As humans created in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:27), we are the ones who should glorify Him. We are given this wonderful privilege of reflecting Him because we were made to reflect Him. If we refuse to do that, the stones will praise Him to His glory and to our shame. Let no one hinder your praise!! **Kingdom citizens must realize that while all of creation glorifies God, we humans are the only ones given the privilege of glorifying Him by being made in His image and likeness.** Christ died for us. Don't let the stones cry out for you – praise God yourself for who He is!!

QUARTER 1: JANUARY-FEBRUARY-MARCH

JANUARY 3 ----- IT STARTS WITH SHOWING TRUE LOVE

JANUARY 10 ----- WE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS

JANUARY 17 ----- SHOWING MERCY AND COMPASSION

JANUARY 24 ----- LIVING IN HARMONY WITH EACH OTHER

JANUARY 31 ----- GOD LOOKS ON THE INSIDE

FEBRUARY 7 ----- WE ARE ALL CREATED BY GOD

FEBRUARY 14 ----- BEING KIND TO FOREIGNERS

FEBRUARY 21 ----- TEARING DOWN BARRIERS

FEBRUARY 28 ----- THE KINGDOM IS FOR EVERYONE

MARCH 7 ----- BEING TRUE WITH OURSELVES

MARCH 14 ----- DID YOU FAIL THE TEST?

MARCH 21 ----- NO FAVORITISM IN THE KINGDOM

MARCH 28 ----- DON'T LET THE STONES CRY OUT FOR YOU!